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SPECIAL OPS

JOURNAL OF THE ELITE FORCES
& SWAT UNITS

VOL.23

Strong Resolve 2002

Polish CT Elite GROM

Spanish Navy UEBC Combat Divers

Italian 9th Parachute Assault Regiment "Col Moschin"

IDF MP Force 100

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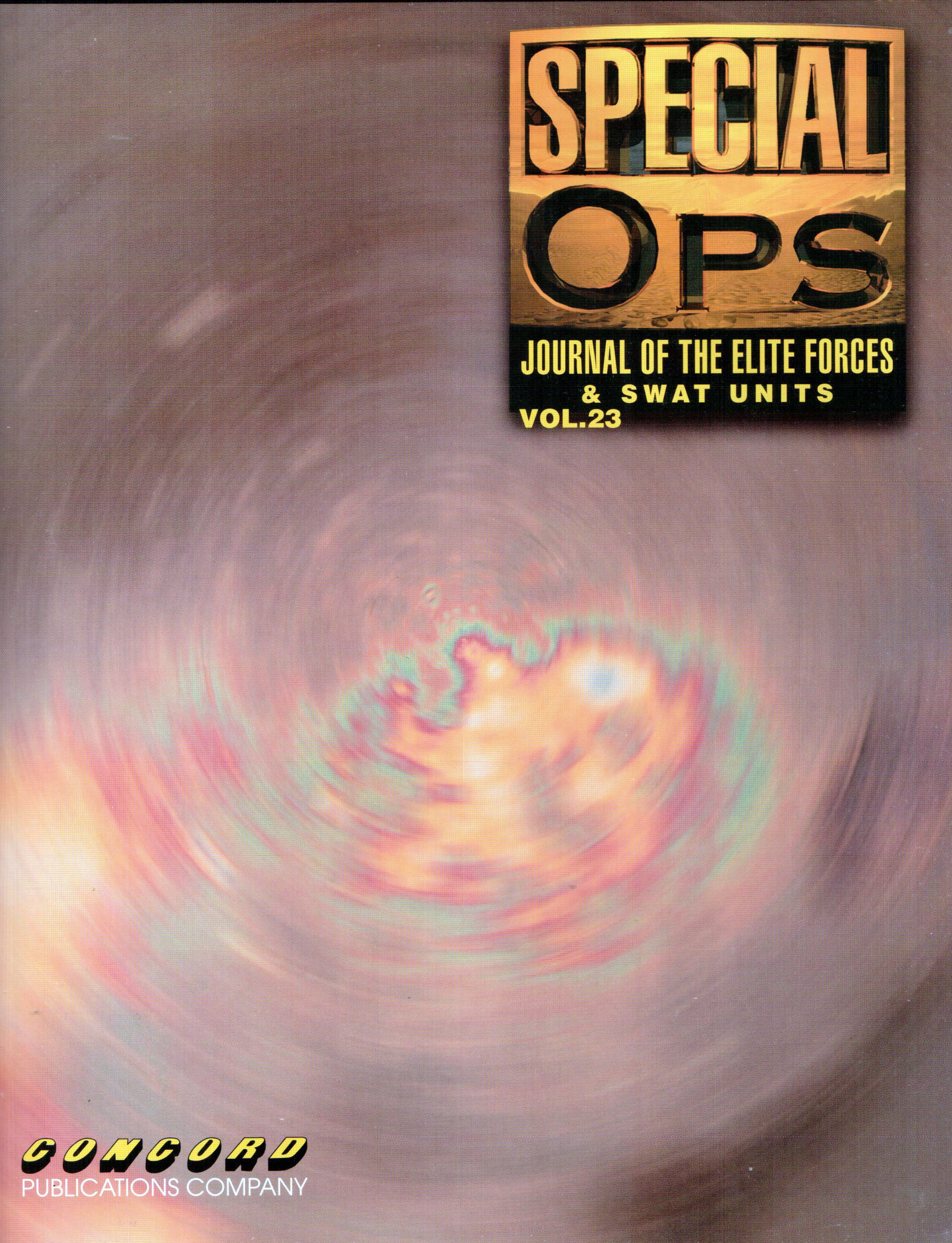

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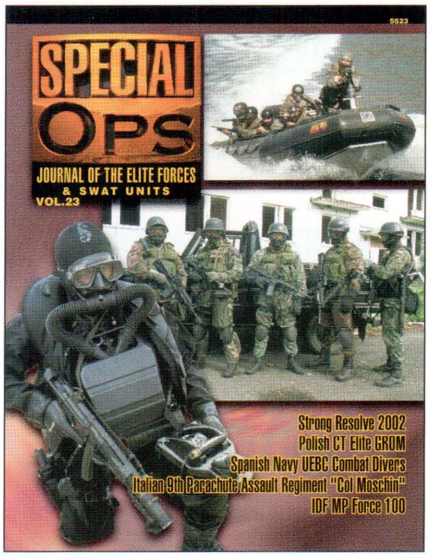
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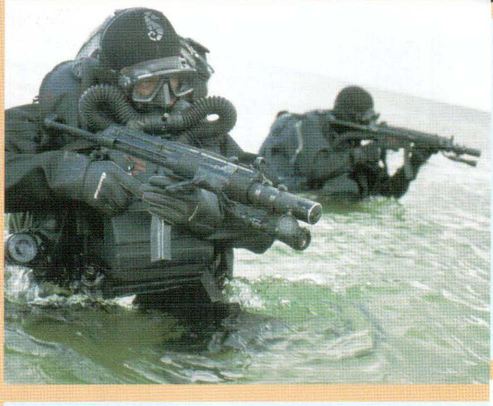
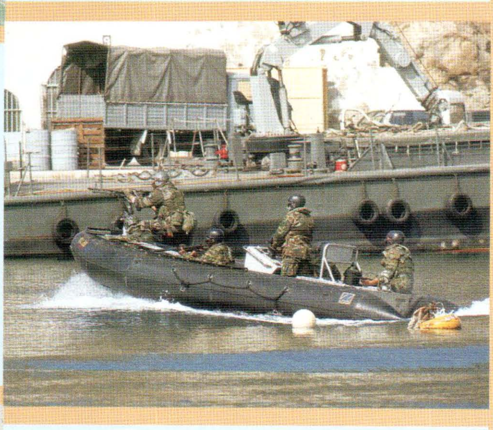
P 3
Strong Resolve 2002
The Crisis Response Operation
Carl Schulze



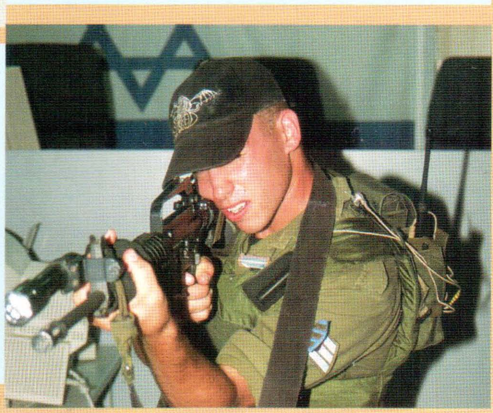
P 23
GROM
Poland's Counter-Terrorist Force
Carl Schulze

P 37
Spain's Devils of the Depths
The Unidad Especial De Buceadores De Combate "Comandante Gorordo" (UEBC)
Juan Pablo Lasterra



P 46
Italian Army 9th Parachute Assault Regiment "Col Moschin"
Alberto Scarpitta

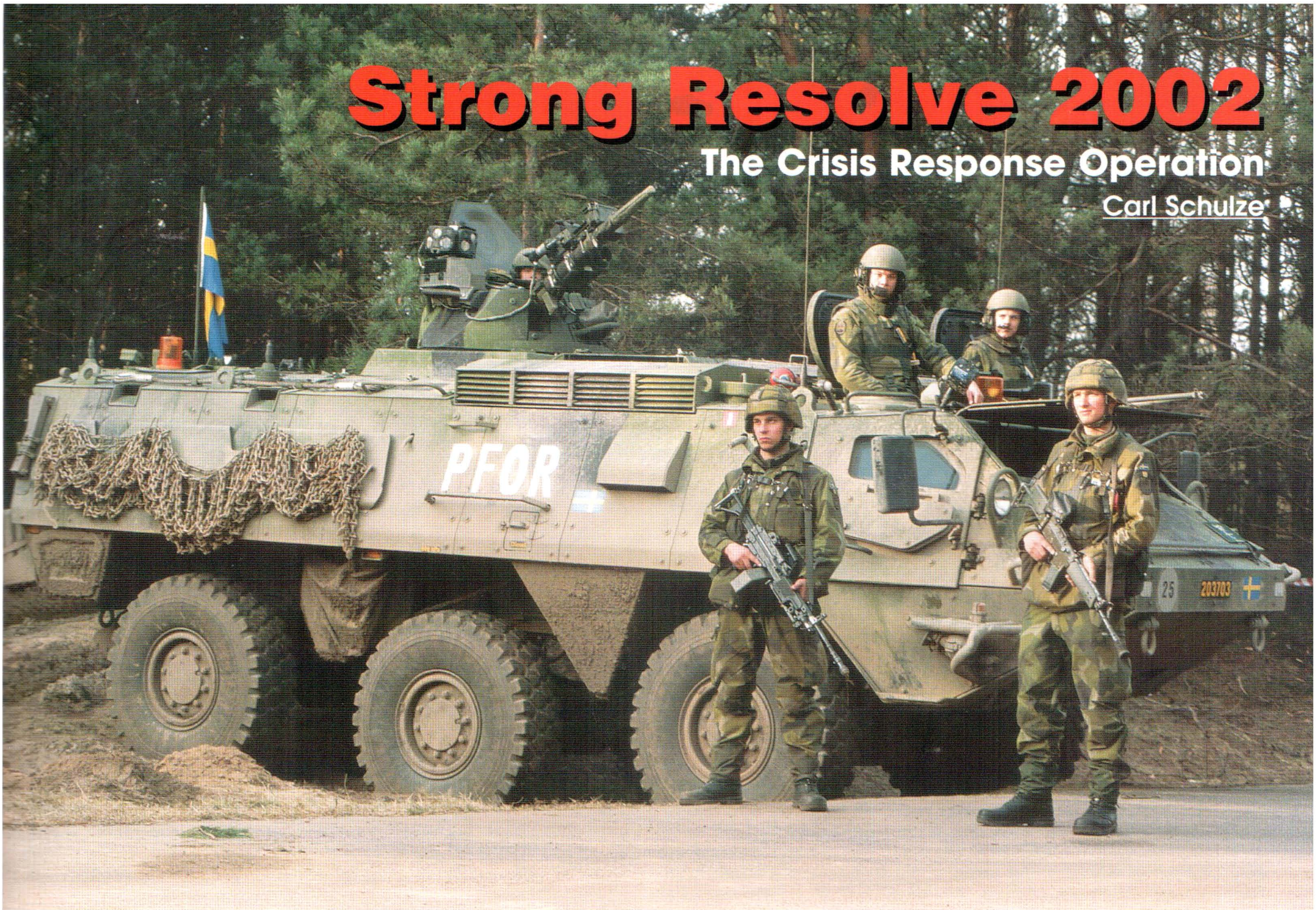
P 57
Commandos Behind Bars
The IDF Military Police "Force 100" Intervention Unit
Samuel M. Katz



Strong Resolve 2002

The Crisis Response Operation

Carl Schulze



Equipped with the 5.56mm AK-5 assault rifle and the 5.56mm MINIMI light machine gun, Swedish infantrymen pose in front of a Patria Sisu XA 203. The Patria Sisu XA 203, a wheeled APC, is fitted with the same one-man turret as the Swedish-made Pbv 302 tracked APC. Mounted in the turret is a 20mm Hispano Suiza cannon.

"NATO go home! NATO go home!" shouts the crowd of people that has gathered in front of the iron gate outside the compound of the Austrian battalion of the peace-support force. Cheered forward by two leaders, the group of approximately 200 people starts to rattle the gate. A large number of the protesters are armed with wooden clubs and missiles such as liquid-filled balloons and raw eggs. Behind the gate, a double line of Austrian soldiers equipped with body armor, helmets with visors, anti-riot shields, and batons provide security for the base as it appears that the gate will not be a real obstacle.

Suddenly the crowd moves forward and hundreds of hands lift the gate out of its joints and pull it from its position. But thanks to the firm line of Austrian soldiers, who with their shields look a little bit like Roman legionnaires, the crowd cannot storm the base. Nevertheless, with the gate missing the soldiers are now easy targets for the eggs and balloons. Within seconds, a barrage of these small projectiles is raining down on the defenders who protect themselves with the shields of the second line who hold them above the heads of the troops in the first line. Again the scene is reminiscent of a Roman or medieval battle.

Following a secret signal from one of their leaders, the crowd suddenly charges at high speed against the line. Numerous sounds of the riot now fill the air: the megaphone voice of an Austrian officer giving orders, a similar voice of the leader of the rioters, screams of attackers and defenders, the sound of wooden clubs hitting shields, and the cracking sound of shields used for stopping karate-type kicks. The living barricade of men and shields takes the violence of the attackers as calmly as possible, and only occasionally is a baton used against a rioter.

The armored infantry component of Austria's Task Force "Comet" was provided by the 2nd Company of Panzergrenadierbataillon *13. The mechanized infantry deployed with 10 Saurer armored personnel carriers, an outdated vehicle that will soon be replaced in the Austrian armed forces by the "Ulan" infantry fighting vehicle. This* Panzergrenadier *is armed with the Steyr AUG and wears the latest pattern Austrian Army infantry combat vest.*

Soldiers of Austrian Panzerbataillon *10 operate a vehicle checkpoint at the line of separation. The Austrian battle group used their Leopard 2A4 main battle tanks widely to back up operations. During vehicle checkpoint operations, the tanks performed perfectly as mobile roadblocks; there is no way for a car to break through 60 tons of fighting machine. The sentry in the foreground is armed with the 5.56mm Sturmgewehr 77, which is better known on the international market as the Steyr AUG.*

The rioters are now pressing hard against the shield wall and the attacks get even more aggressive with clubs and kicks. Six rioters pull an Austrian soldier forward out of the line, and immediately he is pushed to the ground and beaten up. His comrades now move forward in one line, pressing against the rioters, and a snatch squad of Slovakian soldiers, armed only with clubs, emerges from behind the line and charges into the crowd to recover the wounded Austrian soldier. To be effective the mission has to be carried out quickly and as a surprise attack. Facing a high level of violence, the defenders now bring forward a water cannon and use tear gas grenades to disperse the rioting mob, but both methods provide relief only for a few minutes before the rioters regroup for another attack.

The scene just described could have taken place in Kosovo or any other place where peace-keeping troops are operating, but in fact it unfolded during Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" in Poland in March 2002. The exercise, which consisted of both a conventional war scenario and a Crisis Response Operation scenario, took place in Norway and Poland. In total, 40,000 troops of 14 NATO and 12 Partnership for Peace nations were involved in the exercise. In this article we will concentrate on the Crisis Response Operation scenario in Poland because in the 21st Century this scenario is faced regularly by most of the troops in places like Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan.

Aim and Objectives of "Strong Resolve 2002"

The aim of Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" was to test NATO's ability to react to two separate but simultaneous crises in different geographical regions. This required the capability to conduct two simultaneous operations, encompassing the full spectrum of NATO missions and drawing on the resources of both of NATO's strategic commanders. The objectives of the exercise were varied. They included: the rapid deployment of multi-national forces; evaluation of the effectiveness of NATO command-and-control structures; further development of the supporting-supported commander concept; validation of doctrines and procedures for sea-based NATO combined joint task forces; training and exercising of operational commanders in rapid adaptation from low to high intensity conflict; and practicing interoperability between multinational joint forces.

Austrian snipers of Task Force "Comet" await orders during a riot control operation. The snipers are armed with the Steyr 7.62mm SSG 69. The manually operated weapon uses a rotating bolt lock and weighs 4.6kg (10lb). The effective range is 800 meters (874 yards) and the weapon has a five-round box magazine. The soldier on the right carries an improvised Y-shaped rifle rest attached to his body armor.

Combined Joint Task Force Concept

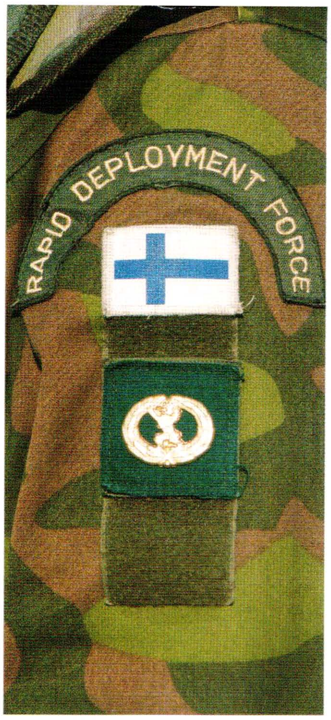
Endorsed by the alliance at the Brussels Summit of January 1994, the NATO Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) concept borrows heavily from the U.S. Joint Task Force model, but expands upon it to include all nineteen NATO allies. Defined as a multinational, multi-service deployable task force generated and tailored for military operations not involving the defense of Alliance territory, a CJTF would place an impressive array of allied forces at the disposal of its commander. These could include ground forces up to the size of an army corps, multiple carrier/amphibious task forces, pertinent Special Forces (psychological and/or special warfare units), and the potential air campaign planning capability to conduct 1,000 sorties per day.

Primarily designed for non-Article Five Crisis Response Operations outside alliance territory (conflict prevention, humanitarian aid, peace keeping and peace enforcement), a CJTF may also be called upon to conduct many other short warning missions, such as non-combatant evacuation, disaster relief, and search and rescue. Simply put, the CJTF embodies a truly self-contained, fully functional, multi-service task force capable of conducting a wide range of military missions on NATO's behalf.

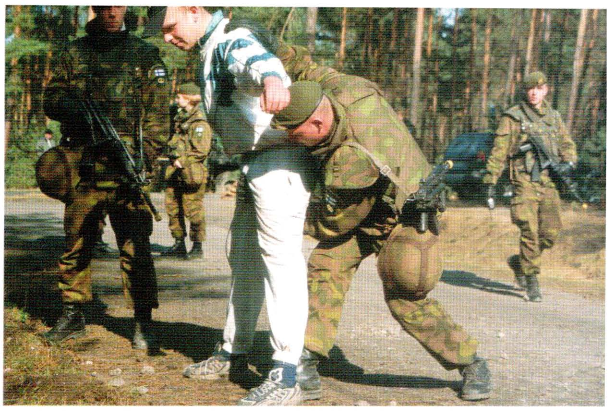
Troops from the Austrian battalion form a wall of shields as protesters threaten to breach the iron gate outside the compound that houses the peace-support force during Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002".

Close-up of an Austrian Panzergrenadier. Note the visor fitted to his ballistic helmet for riot control.

Rioters try to break through the line of Austrian soldiers who control the crowd. During Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", more than 1250 Polish role players gave the exercising troops a very hard time. When asked about them after the demonstration, an Austrian soldier stated: "They provide you with a very realistic impression of what it means to stand in a line during a riot control situation, and it is tough training". Note that the rioters are armed with wooden clubs and are trying to drag soldiers out of the line.



A Finnish mechanized infantry battalion was under the command of the 4th Multinational Brigade, which was deployed to the Zagan training area during Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002". The 280-soldier unit was made up of troops from the Pori Brigade, which is based in southwest Finland and which forms part of the country's Rapid Deployment Forces. Its brigade badge is seen in this picture. The battalion consisted of a HQ and logistic support company and two mechanized infantry companies. The equipment of the battalion consisted of 16 Finnish-built Patria-Sisu wheeled APCs, four BV 206 all terrain carriers, and 16 trucks in different sizes.



Finnish infantrymen search demonstrators for weapons and explosives in an effort to prevent riots from taking place prior to a political demonstration. While one soldier conducts the search, a second provides cover with his 7.62mm Sako M 90 automatic rifle.

Just how well "Strong Resolve 2002" was prepared by the planning staff became obvious when troops involved in the exercise were given papers showing names and faces of war criminals. Here Finnish infantrymen try to identify some of the suspects during a political demonstration. The Treelian demonstration, which was at first peaceful, became uneasy when a small group of Woodyar citizens started to shout insults at the participants. At this time Finnish troops began to push the Woodyars out of range and sight of the Treelian people to prevent an escalation of tension.

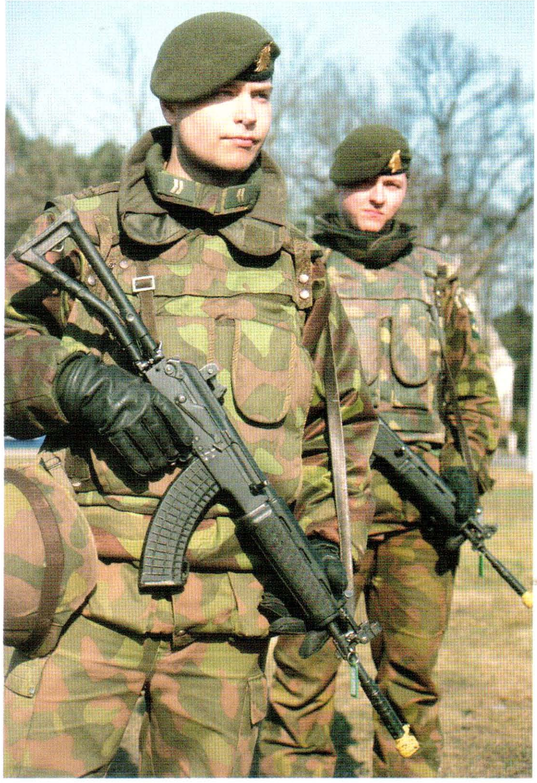
"Man down!" During riot control training, an Austrian mechanized infantryman was dragged out of the shield wall and beaten up by the violent mob after he has been forced to the ground, a situation which in reality would probably end with several injuries or even the death of the unlucky soldier. Thank goodness "Strong Resolve 2002" was only a very realistic exercise and the Polish role players soon left the scared soldier alone, but he undoubtedly learned a lesson he will never forget.

Three NATO Commands - Regional Command North, Regional Command South, and Striking Fleet Atlantic (SFL) - are currently designated as CJTF Parent Headquarters. Of these, only SFL is sea-based, and the advantages of this are substantial. First, a sea-based CJTF HQ is easier and faster to move. It provides rapid crisis response and can operate over greater distances without additional command echelons. Secondly, SFL offers the political leadership a pliable and flexible diplomatic tool. It can hover off the coast sending a subtle deterrence message or it can command forces ashore, signaling a far more determined posture. Thirdly, the sea-based CJTF HQ also provides unique military flexibility; it is extremely mobile and can perform missions across the spectrum of conflict.

SFL routinely trains for everything from peace operations to outright hostilities, publishing the best practices after each exercise. Finally, the sea-based HQ carries with it an inherent ability to both sustain and protect itself. During Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", Commander Striking Fleet Atlantic operated from the USS *Mount Whitney*, an amphibious command ship that serves as NATO's sea-based Combined Joint Task Force Headquarters platform.

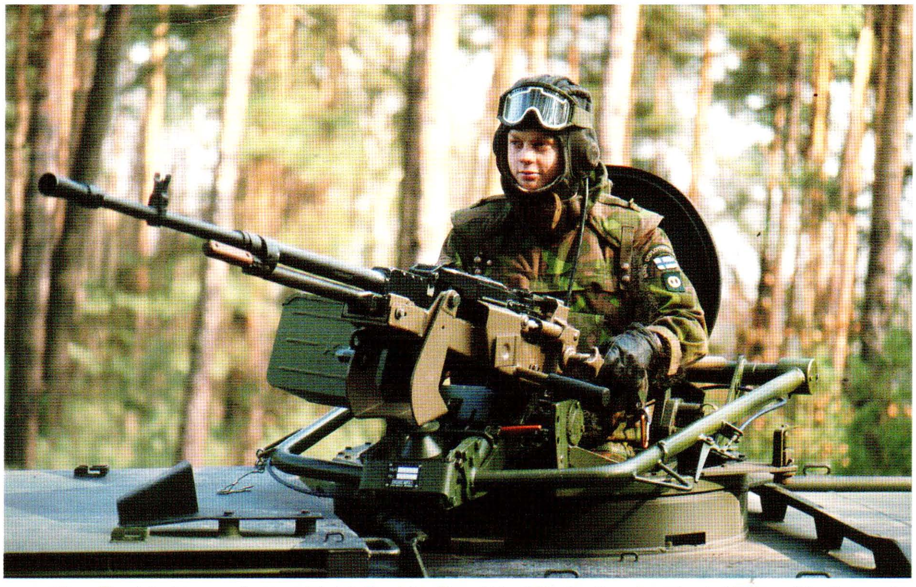
Crisis Response Operation Scenario

Prior to 1990, the regions known as Woodland and Treeland together formed the country of Granica. Through a popular Woodyar president in 1974, Granica prospered and achieved high economic growth. With Woodyars controlling the government and military, stability did not last. During this decline, Treelians responded with a revolutionary movement, the Treelian Patriotic Front (TPF).

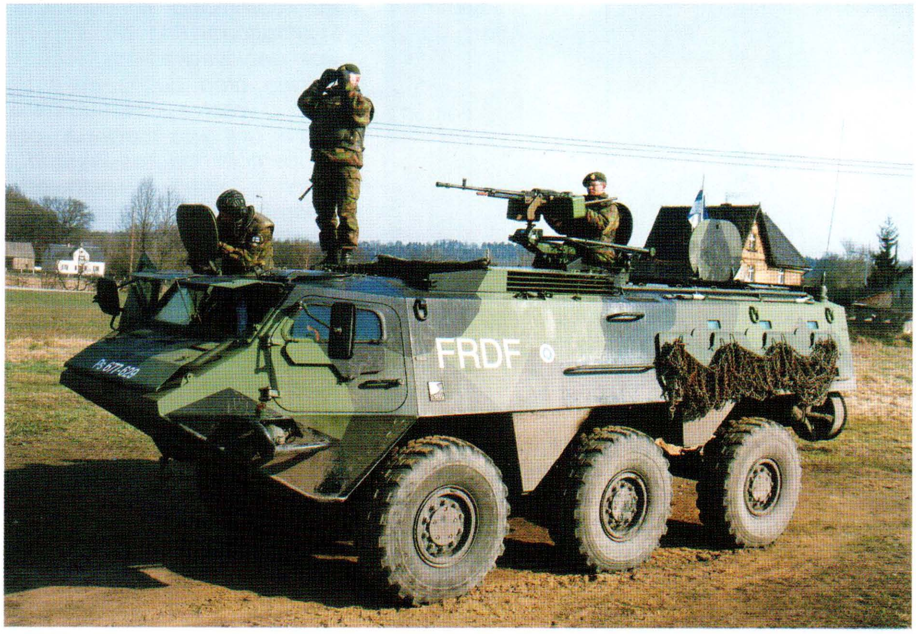


A corporal and a private of the Finnish Army on patrol in Poland during Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002". Both are armed with the 7.62mm x 39mm Sako M 90 automatic rifle. The gas operated weapon features a rotating bolt lock and has a theoretical rate of fire of 600 to 750 rounds per minute. The weight of the weapon is 3.85kg (8.5lb).

Of the 280 Finnish soldiers in Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", 230 were conscripts. Conscripts in the Rapid Deployment Forces undergo six months of training and have to volunteer for at least three months of service with one of the Finnish international commitments. The Pori Brigade used Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" as the final test of the Finnish training cycle for conscripts who may soon see service in Kosovo.



The Finnish troops brought 16 Partria-Sisu XA 185 (6x6) wheeled APCs with them to Poland. The vehicle has a combat weight of 22 tons and there is space inside for the three-man crew – which consists of a driver, commander and machine gunner – and eight men. Powered by a Valmet 6-cylinder, turbo-charged, inter-cooled, diesel engine that develops 217hp at 2000rpm, the vehicle has a maximum road speed of 90km/h (56mph). A Russian-made 12.7mm NSV machine gun is installed on the roof of the deployed Finnish XA 185.



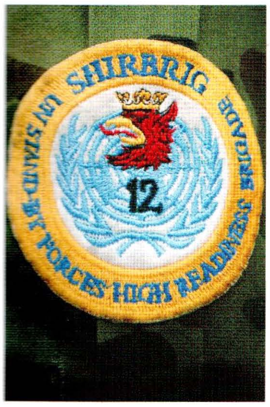
During the last couple of years, the XA 180 6x6 wheeled armored vehicle family, to which the XA 185 belongs, became popular among international forces as armored transport for troops deployed in peace-support operations. Other nations using vehicles from the XA 180 family are Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Ireland.

Internal problems within the government soon weakened the economy, causing the military to dwindle, and widespread civil unrest. In Woodyar-dominated areas of the country, local military commanders were in control. In the southern and western provinces, the TPF maintained control. This split in the control of the country soon led to the overthrow of the Woodyar government. The civil unrest continued until the United Nations intervened by dividing Granica into Treeland and Woodland, with the border drawn along the existing military positions at the time of the ceasefire.

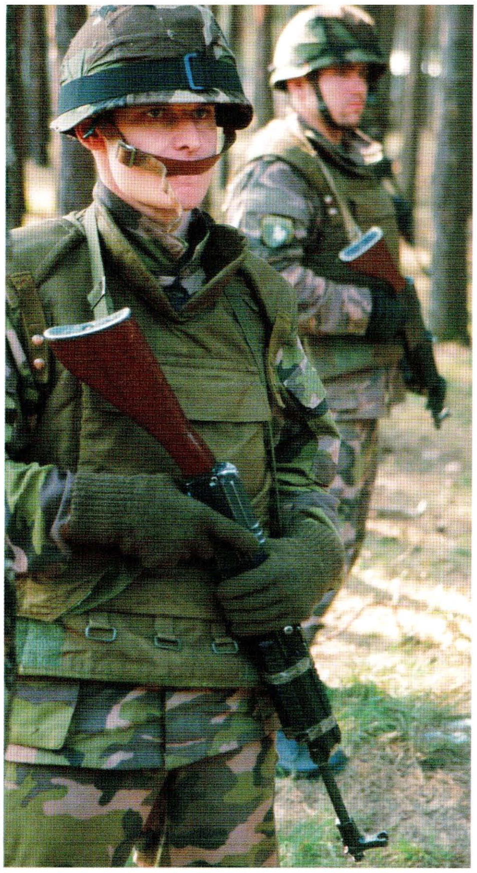
After the UN-supervised ceasefire, the new Woodland government concentrated its energies on restoring order and maintaining unity within the population. However, this unity did not extend to the Treelians who remained in Woodland. They faced stiff oppression from the ruling administration. Coincidentally, the Woodland government expressed concerns for the survival of Woodyar culture, as well as the civil rights of Woodyars in Treeland.

As part of the young government's reforms, the Woodland military enjoyed large budget increases over the domestic programs. Treeland attempted to establish a social democratic government based on a Western European model. Poor farm policies were driving the rural

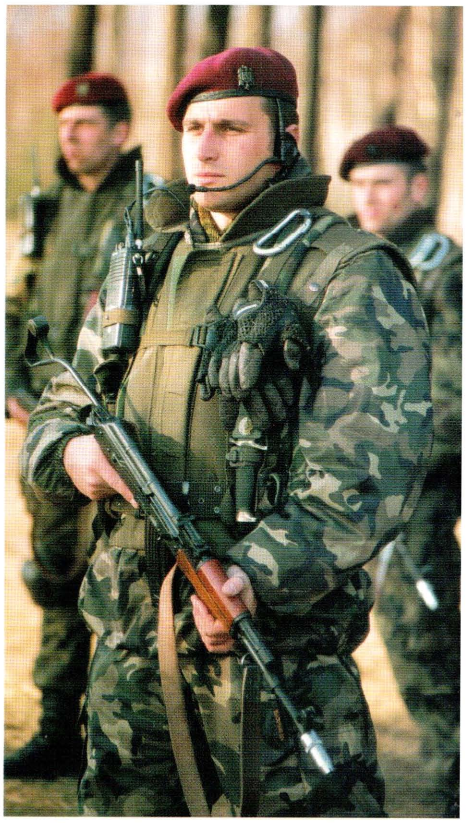
After the rioting crowd had been dispersed by a water cannon, the Austrian shield wall opened up and a snatch squad provided by Slovakian soldiers went to work arresting the leaders of the crowd. A 44-soldier armored infantry platoon of the Slovakian forces' Immediate Reaction Battalion was attached under the command of the Austrian Task Force "Comet".



Badge of the "United Nations Stand-By Forces High Readiness Brigade" (SHIRBRIG) to which Poland donated the 1st Mechanized Infantry Battalion of the 12th Mechanized Brigade of the 12th Mechanized Division, which is based in Stettin. During Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", the 12th Mechanized Brigade provided a 250-person brigade HQ as exercise troops in addition to the 650 soldiers of the 1st Mechanized Infantry Battalion. The Polish-led brigade, which participated in the Wedrzyn training area, also incorporated the 3rd Parachute Lancers Regiment, a Slovenian Military Police platoon, and a platoon of Czech paratroopers.



The Slovakian armored infantry soldiers deployed to Poland without their BMP-1 armored personnel carriers and used trucks instead. These two Slovakian soldiers are armed with the locally made 7.62mm Model 58 assault rifle. Designed during the Czechoslovakia era, the weapon is similar in appearance to the Russian AK-47 but features significant differences. Note that the versions used by troops deployed to the NATO exercise feature a "Picatinny" mounting rail at the forward hand guard.



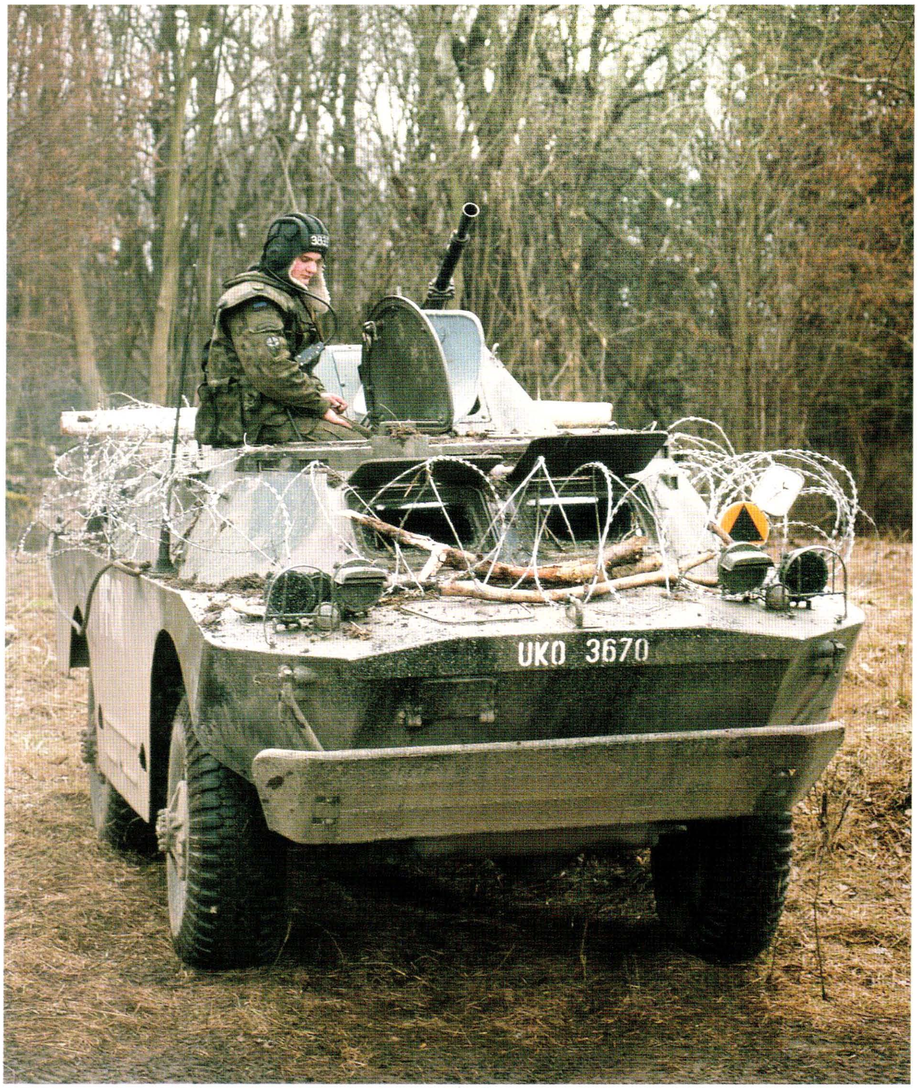
During Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", a Romanian infantry platoon came under the command of one of the two tank companies of Task Force "Comet". The 22-soldier platoon was formed of cadets from the Romanian army academy, which is situated in the city of Sibiu. This cadet wears body armor and is armed with the Romanian version of the AK-74 Kalashnikov. The license-made 5.45mm weapon features a pistol grip under the hand guard and a folding stock.

Woodyar population to Treeland cities for work. Treelians dominated the economy in the cities and kept Woodyars in low paying jobs and in poor, segregated sections of the cities. Treeland also enacted some "Unity" measures that did not please ethnic Woodyars and angered nearby Woodland. Because of these unity programs, Woodyars in Treeland formed a separatist movement, the Free Woodyar Party (FWP). Woodland provided covert funding for the movement.

Civil discord continued in Woodyar-dominated areas. Treelians continued to express their unwavering support for Woodyar autonomy. Most of the land that the Woodyars demanded from Treeland was of little value. Through international pressure, Treeland agreed to an UN-monitored vote on Woodyar national self-determination (NSD). The NSD was hotly debated in affected areas of the country. Treeland Woodyars were economically better off and had more freedom than their Woodland counterparts. When the vote was held, it failed by less than one percent of the vote.

Soon after the vote, both Woodland and the FWP claimed that the election was rigged and demanded immediate autonomy for Woodyar-dominated areas in northwest and southeast Treeland. Riots incited by Woodland popped up in several areas. This civil unrest soon grew beyond the ability of the Treeland police or

Keeping a sharp lookout from their position on a roof and armed with the 7.62mm x 54R Dragunov SVD sniper rifle, a sniper team of the Slovakian armored infantry platoon provides cover for their Austrian comrades. In riot control scenarios during peace-support operations, snipers are often used as backup for the troops deployed forward. With their highly accurate weapons and their skills, the snipers are able to take out rioters armed with guns.



The 1st Mechanized Infantry Battalion of the 12th Mechanized Brigade, which formed the core of the Polish PFOR troops, used BRDM-2 and BVP-1 armored vehicles during Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002". This BRDM-2 has barbed wire placed on its hull to prevent rioters from climbing onto the vehicle when it is used for riot control missions. The BRDM-2 is an amphibious wheeled armored reconnaissance vehicle armed with a turret-mounted 14.5mm KVPT and a 7.62mm PKT machine gun.

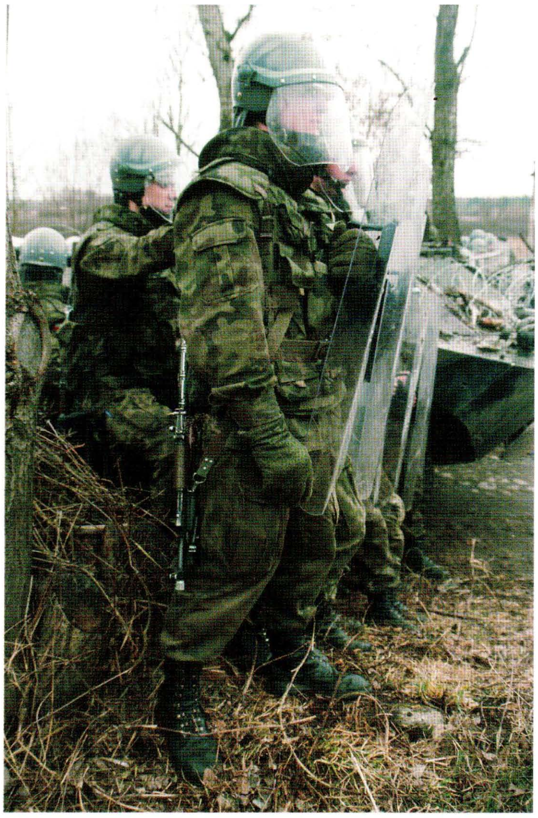
army to control. Soon the Treeland government was unable to maintain order and services in Woodyar-dominated areas. Thousands of Treelians and some Woodyars lost homes and businesses and fled to central Treeland.

In November 2000, Woodland's army crossed the border into northwest and southeast Treeland to restore order and protect the property of Woodyars. The international community quickly condemned the invasion. Influenced by this outside pressure, Woodland stated that it would only occupy Woodyar-dominated areas of Treeland. Treeland fought a fierce rearguard action, but within two weeks Woodland had achieved its objectives.

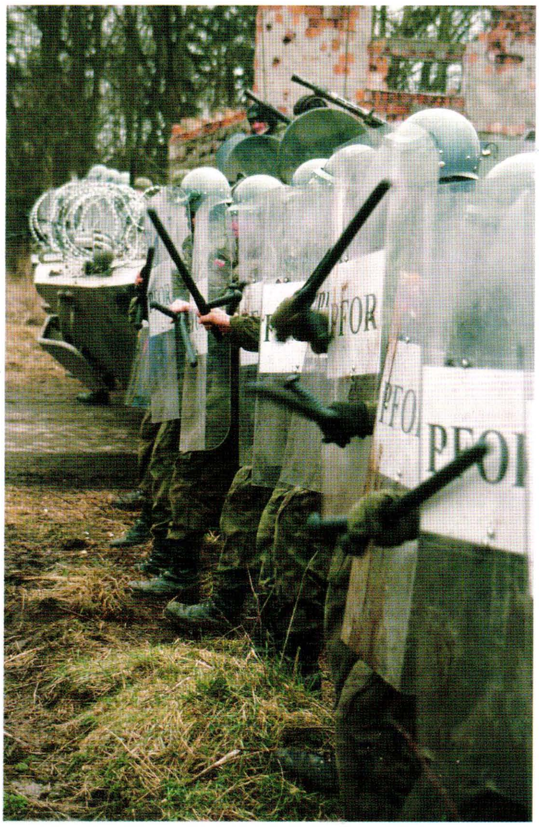
Treeland appealed to the UN and NATO for intervention. The UNSC demanded immediate cessation of hostilities by both countries before it would consider the problem. Woodland and Treeland agreed and requested UN assistance to arrange a formal cease-fire. The cease-fire allowed the UN to respond to a growing humanitarian crisis in war-ravaged areas. The UN Secretary General requested that the NATO Secretary General consider a NATO-led crisis response operation (CRO). The North Atlantic Council accepted the UN request and UN Security Council Resolution 6370 was passed. In January 2001, NATO authorized deployment of a CRO under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. NATO also activated Commander Striking Fleet Atlantic (designated as COMPFOR – Commander Peace Force), NATO's only sea-based Combined Joint Task Force Headquarters aboard USS *Mount Whitney* (LCC/JCC 20).

List of Participating Nations and Troops

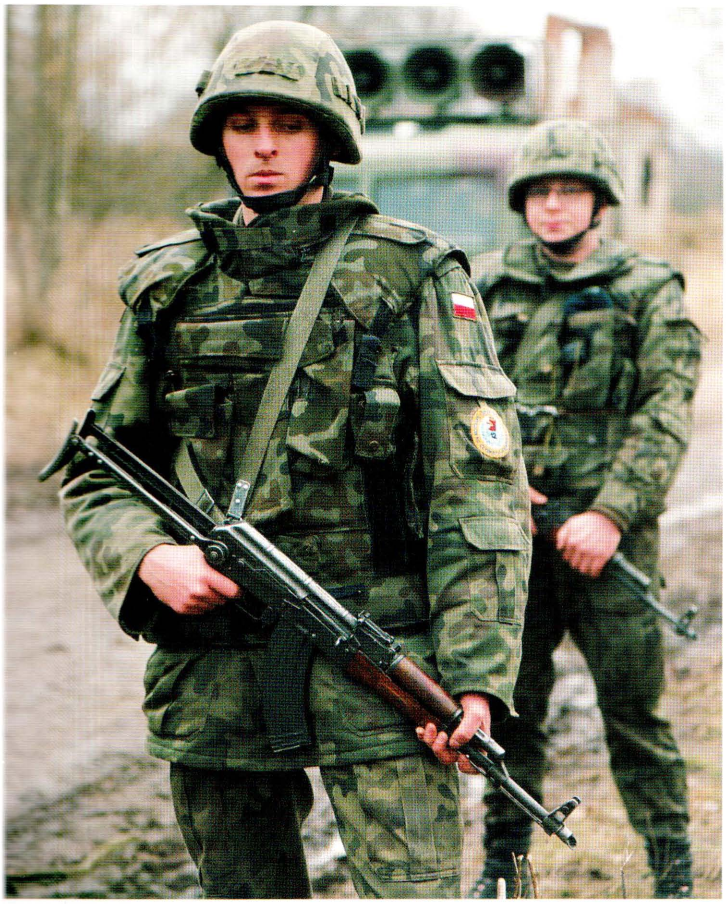
Between the 1st and 15th of March, more than 40,000 troops exercised in Poland, Norway and in the Baltic Sea. In the Article 5 scenario in Norway, only NATO troops of 13 NATO Nations (Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Spain, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Germany, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States) were involved.



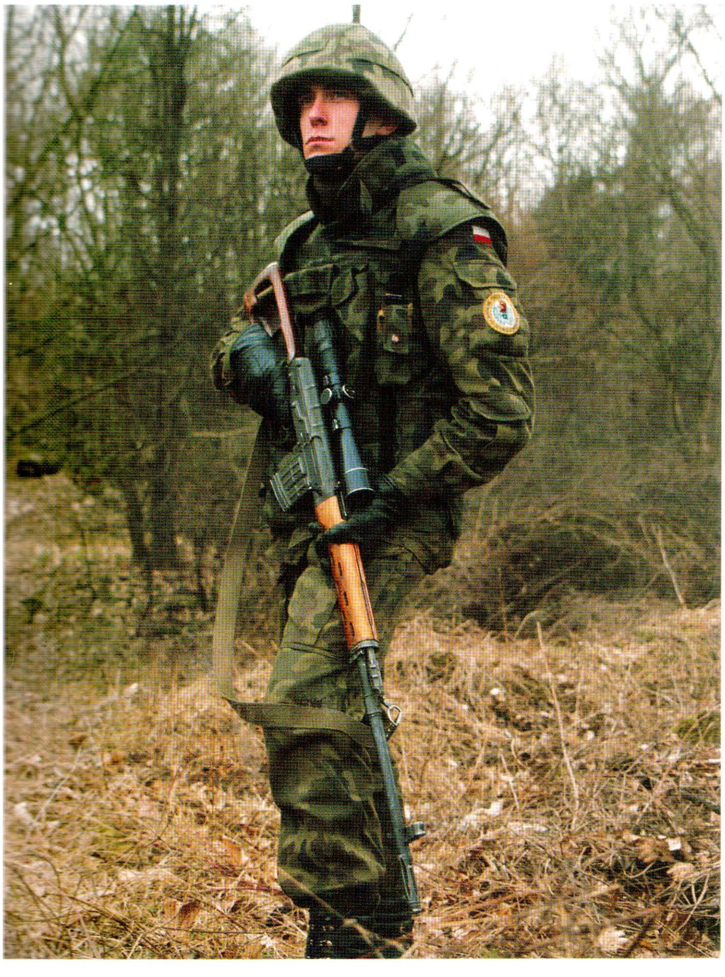
The riot control equipment of this Polish infantryman from 2nd Company of the 1st Mechanized Infantry Battalion consists of an anti-riot helmet, a shield and a baton. For personal protection, he wears body armor and carries a 7.62mm PMKM assault rifle.

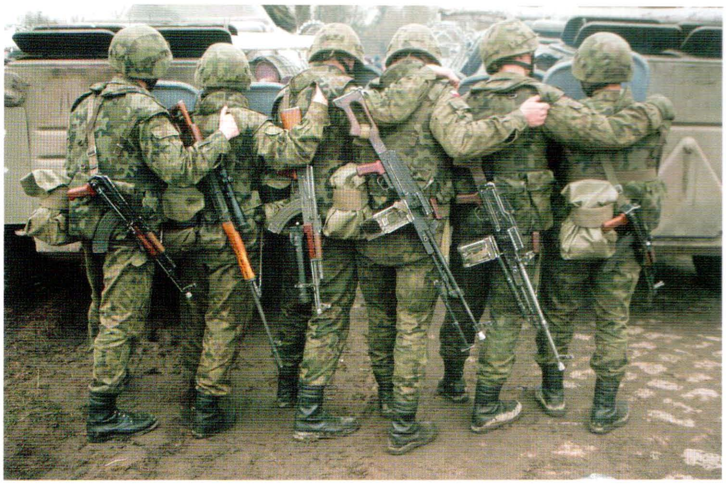


Banging batons on their shields, Polish soldiers advance behind a violent crowd during a crowd control scenario. This technique provides a frightening sound that often is all that is needed to stop a crowd from further rioting. Note the two BRDM-2s in the center of the advancing line. The vehicles are used as an anchor point from which the advancing line of infantrymen spreads left and right.

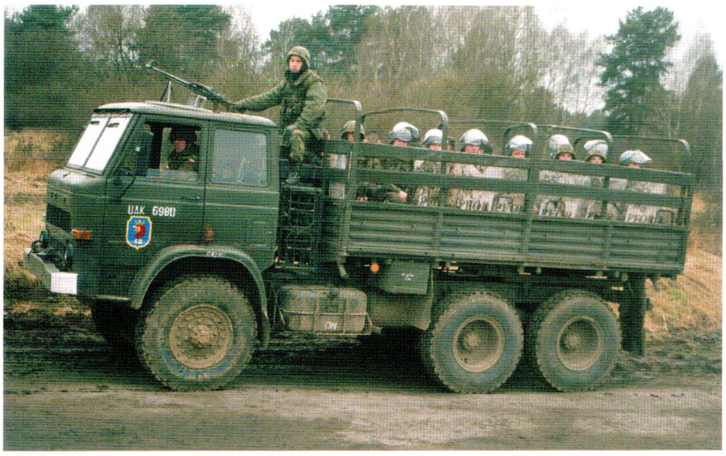


Armed with 7.62mm PMKM assault rifles, two Polish soldiers of the 2nd Company of the 1st Mechanized Infantry Battalion provide area security while their comrades perform crowd control duty. They wear the latest pattern Polish camouflage uniforms, body armor with integrated combat vest and ballistic-type helmets. Note the SHIRBRIG badge worn on the left sleeve.





This rear view of a group of Polish mechanized infantrymen from the 12th Mechanized Division forming a shield wall during riot control training shows an interesting selection of Polish infantry weapons. Visible are a 7.62mm PMKM assault rifle, a Polish version of the Kalashnikov, a 7.62mm Dragunov SVD sniper rifle, a 7.62mm PMKM assault rifle fitted with a 40mm Pallad grenade launcher, and 7.62mm PK and PKM machine guns.



After an exhausting two hours of crowd control operations, Polish soldiers of the 2nd Company of the 1st Mechanized Infantry Battalion have mounted their trucks to return to their base at the Wedrzyn training area. The truck is a 3.5 ton STAR 266 (6x6) powered by a 6-cylinder diesel engine that provides a top speed of 90km/h (56mph).

The Crisis Response Operation scenario in Poland involved 26,000 troops of 14 NATO Nations and 12 non-NATO nations of the Partnership for Peace program. In addition to the NATO nations of Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Italy, Spain, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Germany, the Netherlands, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the following non-NATO nations sent forces or attached officers to exercise HQs: Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The following list includes only ground troops:

Austria:
- 1x mechanized infantry battalion
- National Support Element
- Brigade HQ

Belgium:
- 1x airborne infantry battalion

Bulgaria:
- 1x mechanized infantry platoon
- 1x special forces platoon

Posing for the camera, this Polish sniper of the SHIRBRIG is armed with the 7.62mm x 54R Dragunov SVD sniper rifle. He wears the latest pattern Polish camouflage uniform, body armor with integrated combat vest, and a ballistic-type helmet.

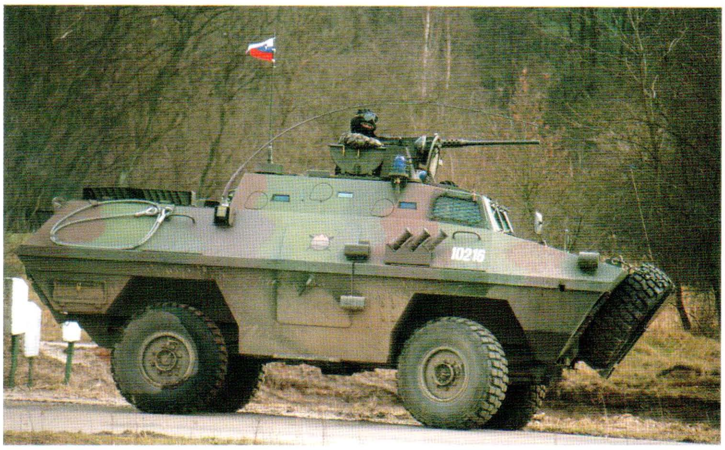
The Slovenian forces deployed during Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" consisted of a 32-troop military police company that was attached to the Polish brigade. The soldiers were drawn from the 17th Military Police Battalion of the Slovenian army. In addition to some Steyr Daimler Puch-manufactured G wagons, they brought along two BOV VP wheeled armored personnel carriers. Here several soldiers of the unit go through a mission briefing just before going out to investigate an exercise murder scenario.

Czech Republic:
- 1x airborne infantry platoon

Denmark:
- 1x mechanized infantry battalion
- 1x combat service support battalion
- 1x mechanized infantry reconnaissance company
- 1x brigade HQ company
- 1x military police company
- 1x engineer company
- 1x Hawk battery
- 1x electronic countermeasures company
- 1x attack helicopter platoon (4 Fennec helicopters)
- 1x utility helicopter platoon (2 Cayuse helicopters)

Estonia:
- 1x infantry reconnaissance platoon

Finland:
- 1x mechanized infantry battalion



The BOV VP is a 9400-kg (20,680-lb) 4x4 light wheeled armored personnel carrier used in Slovenia by both the armed forces and the police. The crew consists of the driver, commander and eight infantrymen. Powered by a 6-cylinder diesel engine, the vehicle reaches a maximum road speed of 95km (59mph) and, with its 220-liter (58-gallon) fuel capacity, has a road range of 500km (310 miles). Mounted on top of the vehicle is a .50-caliber M2HB machine gun, and a bank of three smoke dischargers is situated on each side. The second BOV VP taking part in Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" was fitted with anti-riot side skirts, fence-type panels that can be extended to the side to provide a stable base for the troops.

These Slovenian MPs, who are preparing to go on patrol in a Land Rover, are armed with the Yugoslav M 70 rifle, a locally made modernized AK-47 manufactured by Zastava. (Yves Debay)

France:
- 1x special forces platoon

Germany:
- HQ and signal company (*Panzerbrigade* 21)

Latvia:
- 1x infantry company
- National Support Element

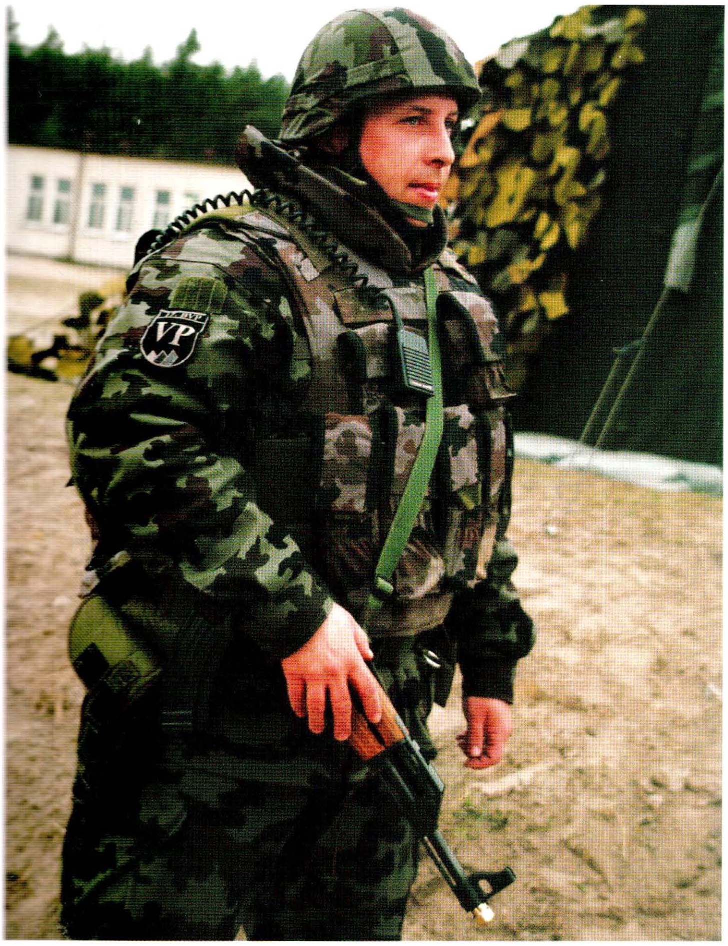
Lithuania:
- 1 infantry platoon

Poland:
- 1x mechanized battalion
- 1x HQ battalion
- 1x GBAD SAM 3 battery
- 12th Division HQ (opposing forces)
- 2900 role players from 16th Division, 2nd Brigade and 7th Brigade

Romania:
- 1x platoon of marines
- 1x infantry platoon
- 1x infantry reconnaissance squad
- 1x psychological operations element

Slovakia:
- 1x mechanized infantry platoon

Slovenia:
- 1x military police platoon



This photograph offers a good look at a Slovenian military policeman's combat equipment. Armed with a 7.62mm M 70AB2 assault rifle, the Yugoslavian license-made AKM, he wears a combination of combat vest and body armor and a ballistic helmet. The camouflage pattern is similar to the former Yugoslavian army pattern, but for Slovenian purposes it is manufactured in a darker, grayer color scheme.

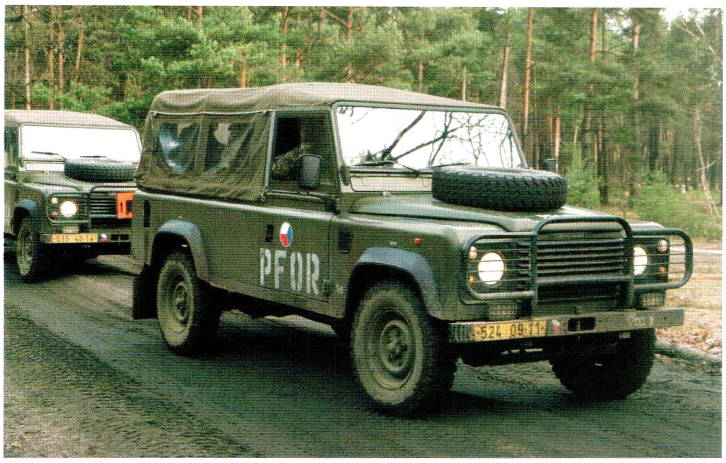
Sweden:

- 1x battalion of marines
- 1x mechanized infantry battalion

Ukraine:

- 1x airborne infantry company
- 1x engineer platoon

The Belgian army took part in Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" with a 370-soldier force from the 3rd Parachute Lancers Regiment, consisting of the HQ and logistic squadron of the regiment, as well as two combat squadrons. The Belgian troops deployed with Bombardier Iltis 4x4 light vehicles and UNIMOG 2-ton trucks. Here a Belgian Para Commando armed with his 5.56mm FN FNC assault rifle co-operates with Polish infantry during a riot control mission. Note the Brigade Para Commando badge on his right sleeve.



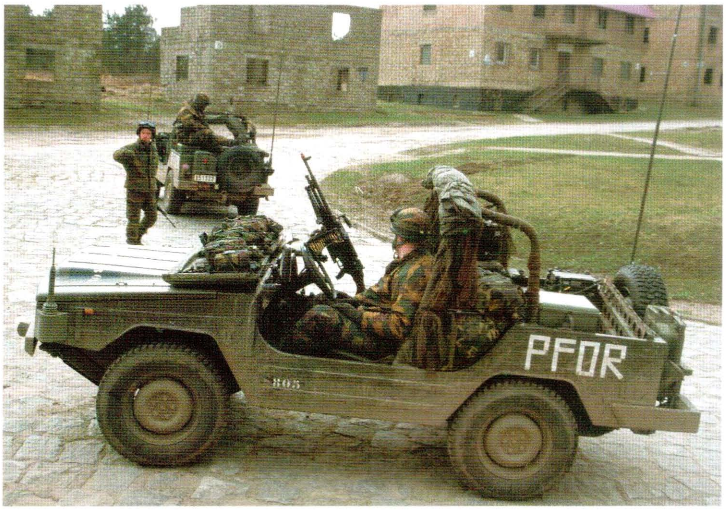
The 25-soldier Czech platoon used Land Rover 110 soft-top vehicles during Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002". The soldiers of the platoon were drawn from the 4th Rapid Reaction Brigade, which also provides the troops for the Czechoslovakian SFOR commitment. During the exercise, the platoon came under command of the Belgian 3rd Parachute Lancers Regiment.

Also involved in the Crisis Response Operation part of Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" were 88 military aircraft from ground attack fighter to early warning aircraft. Aircraft taking part came from Belgium (4x F-16), Denmark (20x F-16, 1x G111), France (1x E3F), Italy (2x HH3F and 1x C-130), Poland (4x MiG-29, 20x SU-22, 1x An-28, 1x Mi-8 and 2x W3 Sokol), the Netherlands (4x F-16), Finland (4x F-18), Latvia (1x L410), Lithuania (1x Mi-8 and 1x An-26), Romania (2x MiG-21, 2x Puma and 1x C-130 Hercules), Sweden (4x Viggen), United Kingdom (7x Jaguar), and Ukraine (1x IL-76).

On the maritime side, 41 ships took part in the Article 5 scenario in Norway, while 98 ships took part in the Crisis Response Operation scenario. Ships from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Estonia, Latvia, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States were deployed to the Baltic Sea.

Realistic Training Involving 1250 Role Players

The size of the Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" Crisis Response



A pair of Bombardier Iltis 4x4 light vehicles of the reconnaissance squadron of the 3rd Parachute Lancers Regiment. Here two Iltis fitted with the 7.62mm FN MAG machine guns are seen in the FIBUA (Fighting in Built-Up Area) village of the Wedrzyn training area, which provided a perfect background for several exercise scenarios. The 4x4 Iltis light vehicle was originally designed by Volkswagen in Germany and is manufactured under license by Bombardier in Canada. The 1550-kg (3410-lb) light vehicle has a payload of 550kg (1210lb), is powered by a 4-cylinder petrol engine and has a maximum road speed of 130km/h (81mph). The 3rd Parachute Lancers Regiment uses the Iltis for light reconnaissance operations. Usually two Iltis vehicles form a patrol, with each vehicle carrying three soldiers.

The 3rd Parachute Lancers Regiment forms an elite unit within the elite Belgian Para Commando Brigade and has already seen action during peace-support operations in Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo. During Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", the unit formed part of the Polish-led Brigade that operated on the Wedrzyn training area. This Para Commando soldier wears the latest Belgian Army combat vest and is armed with the 5.56mm FN FNC assault rifle.

After Belgian Para Commandos and Czech paratroopers of the 4th Rapid Reaction Brigade conclude a joint patrol, the troops return to their base somewhere in the Wedrzyn training area. During the patrols, the soldiers often encountered situations such as illegal roadblocks conducted by militias from Woodland or Treeland, mine incidents, and refugees seeking help.

During Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", the Estonian infantry reconnaissance platoon was busy conducting patrols in the area of responsibility of the Multinational Battalion and providing escorts for local authorities travelling through areas controlled by the other ethnic group. Here two VW Iltis of the Estonian infantry reconnaissance platoon, which are armed with machine guns and light anti-tank weapons, conduct such an escort mission.

Operation training allows only a brief overview of the incidents that took place between the 5th and the 14th of March during the live exercise period. To achieve a maximum level of training, each battalion-size formation of the ground forces was usually drawn into two major incidents within 24 hours. During real time operations the incident rate is far lower, but the high number of incidents insured that there was no boredom for the soldiers. Incidents ranged from small ones like a weapon being found in a car at a checkpoint to large one involving rioting crowds.

The troops involved in the exercise were tasked with guarding refugee camps, escorting convoys of refugees or troops of the warring factions through hostile ground occupied by other ethnic groups, investigating situations after crimes had been committed, dealing with hostage rescue operations, maintaining a weapon exclusion zone and a zone of separation between opposing ethnic groups, and dealing with mine threats and UXO accidents. Other scenarios included CIMIC operations such as delivering aid, providing engineer support to local facilities like schools, and erecting camps for refugees.

Realism was increased by using 1250 Polish role players – among them 100 women – who were especially employed for this task and played their parts very realistically. The Livex part of Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" began on the 5th of March after the participating troops were deployed to the Polish training areas at Zagan, Wedrzyn, Drawsko Pomorski, Okonek and Ustka. The role players prepared for the first 56 incidents in the following sectors of responsibility: "Bravo" (Drawsko Pomorski, Danish Reaction Brigade), "Delta" (Zagan, Austrian-led Brigade) and "Charlie" (Wedrzyn, Polish 12th Mechanized Brigade), and they soon began playing their part in Exercise "Strong Resolve".

A similar number of incidents were conducted all over the exercise region over the next ten days. Many challenging tasks were given to the exercising units to solve. For example, in the Danish sector, in downtown Ziemsko, a small number of Woodyars conducted a demonstration in front of the police station, demanding the release of a Woodyar teen who was arrested on the 6th of March following a traffic accident and a fight with a Treelian youth. The demonstration was another sign of ethnic tensions between Treelians and Woodyars. The commander of "Bravo" sector had to decide how to cope with this problem.

The infantry equipment used by the Latvian troops is of US origin and consists of Woodland-pattern BDUs, "Fritz"-type PASGT vest and helmets, and the individual integrated fighting system tactical load-bearing vest. These two soldiers are armed with the M-16A1 assault rifle.

Another interesting incident took place in the Polish sector. Treelian citizens reported a suspicious car parked near a Malutkow residence. The Polish commander decided to conduct reconnaissance and mark the area. The possible threat was a bomb in the car.

Further, on the 8th of March, a PFOR military vehicle struck a mine at the Drawsko Pomorski Training Area causing multiple injures to PFOR soldiers and civilians. The Danish commander made the decision to start investigating for terrorists and to evacuate wounded people.

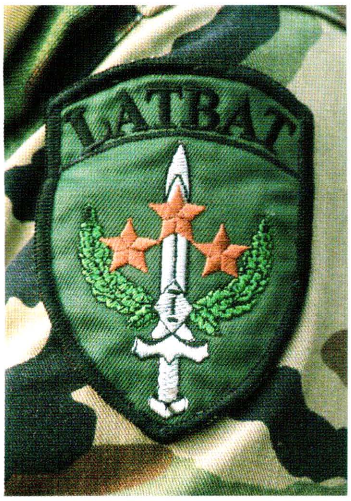
In Sector "Charlie", the Polish AOR, a helicopter carrying a high ranking PFOR representative from Legnica to Szczecin was forced to land in the vicinity of Wedrzyn due to mechanical difficulties. An extremist Treelian leader who had recently issued harsh statements against PFOR claimed to have the crew and named the detained high-ranking PFOR representative. He demanded that PFOR take stronger action against the Woodyars in the region. Following negotiations, a hostage rescue operation was conducted.

On the 9th of March in Sector "Bravo", 200-300 angry Woodyars demonstrated outside the Danish battalion's camp. The demonstrators were angry at PFOR inactivity over recent anti-Woodland rhetoric and repeated attacks and they claimed that PFOR was harboring Treelian war criminals. They threw stones and shouted anti-PFOR slogans and vandalized a number of Treelian homes and businesses during the demonstration. In one incident, an elderly Treelian woman was struck in the head and died. PFOR units eventually controlled the crowd and started a dialogue with local authorities.

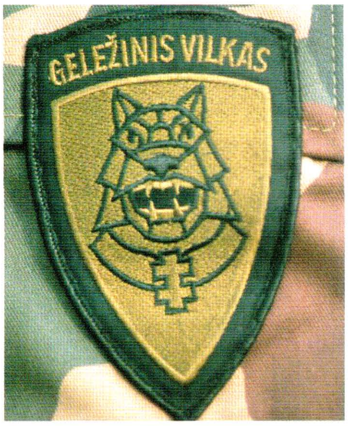
At the same time, in Sector "Charlie" in Wedrzyn, in response to claims of the Treeland press concerning findings about the burning of a Treelian church, a large demonstration of approximately 200-300 Woodyar civilians took place at the church site. Ethnic Woodyars threw objects, shouted anti-PFOR rhetoric, burned the Treeland flag, and protested Treeland's checkpoints in the area. PFOR units successfully controlled the crowd, and the commander of PFOR established a dialogue with local authorities.

On the 10th of March, Treelians and Woodyars established checkpoints on a PFOR patrol route in Sector "Bravo" in order to disrupt the freedom of movement of PFOR and civilians. PFOR threatened to use force to maintain the freedom of movement. On the same day in Sector "Charlie", measles was believed to be spreading among refugees. The lack of fresh water, clothing, heating oil, and medical treatment was still a serious problem in this area. Harassment from Woodland's paramilitary elements increased. The medical service in the sector started to provide help, and soon the sector commander made the decision to evacuate some refugees. Protection of the camp against Woodland paramilitary elements

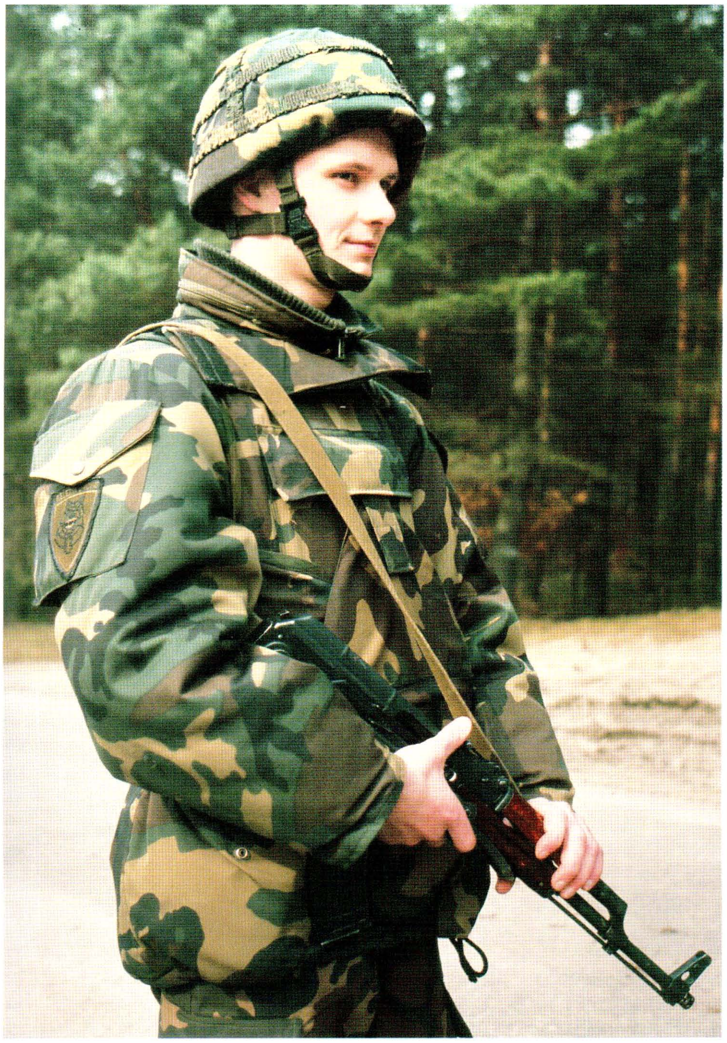
These soldiers can be immediately identified as members of the armed forces of Latvia by the LATBAT badge on their left sleeves. The soldiers were providing flank protection at the Multinational Battalion compound at the Drawsko Pomorski training area when a violent group of Treeland protesters tried to break into the camp to get hold of Woodland refugees.



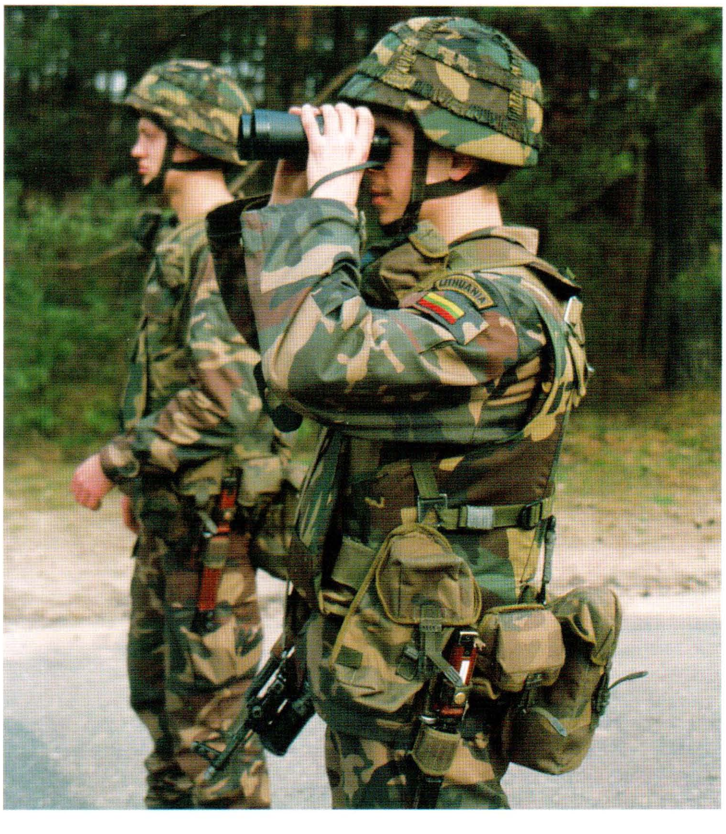
Under the command of the Danish Rapid Reaction Brigade was a multinational battalion consisting of a multinational HQ company, a Latvian infantry company, a Lithuanian infantry platoon, a Bulgarian mechanized infantry platoon, an Estonian infantry reconnaissance platoon and airborne infantry company, and an engineer platoon from Ukraine. Shown here is the badge of the 1st Latvian Infantry Battalion from which the Latvian troops were taken.

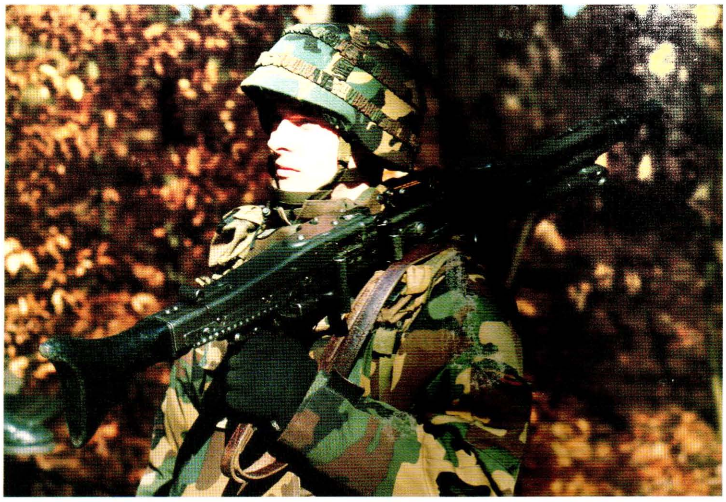


Badge of the Lithuanian "Iron Wolf" Motorized Infantry Brigade. The brigade's "Vytenio" Motorized Infantry Battalion based at Alytus provided the 37-soldier platoon that became part of the Multinational Battalion during Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002". The "Iron Wolf" Brigade also provides the Lithuanian element for the bi-national Lithuanian/Polish Peace Forces Battalion, which achieved combat readiness in December 1998. The unit is destined to take part in international peace-support operations undertaken by WEU, UN, OSCE and NATO.

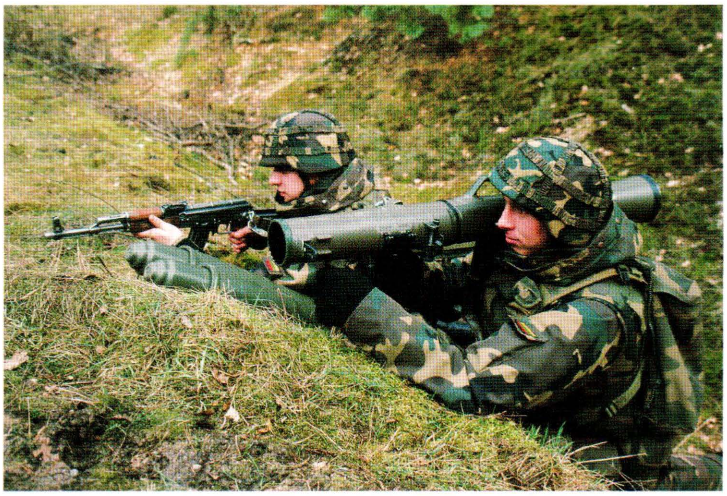


The infantrymen of the Lithuanian "Iron Wolf" Motorized Infantry Brigade use the reliable 7.62mm AK-47 assault rifle as their standard weapon. Wearing the brigade badge, this soldier belongs to a screening force provided by the Lithuanian platoon during a riot control exercise. The mission of the platoon in this scenario was to prevent additional rioters from reaching the scene of the confrontation between peace-support forces and the crowd.





During Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", the soldiers of the Lithuanian infantry used the 7.62mm MG 3 machine gun at the section level. Here a soldier of the "Vytenio" Motorized Infantry Battalion carries the weapon during a mobile VCP operation. The belt-fed weapon has a weight of 11.7kg (26lb) and an effective range of up to 600m (656 yards) when used on the bipod.



An anti-tank team from the "Vytenio" Motorized Infantry Battalion from Lithuania uses an 84mm Carl Gustav anti-tank weapon at a VCP. It is interesting to note that Lithuania, a former part of the Soviet Union, has abandoned most of their former infantry equipment – except for the Kalashnikov – in order to make its forces' equipment more compatible with the kit used in the NATO forces.

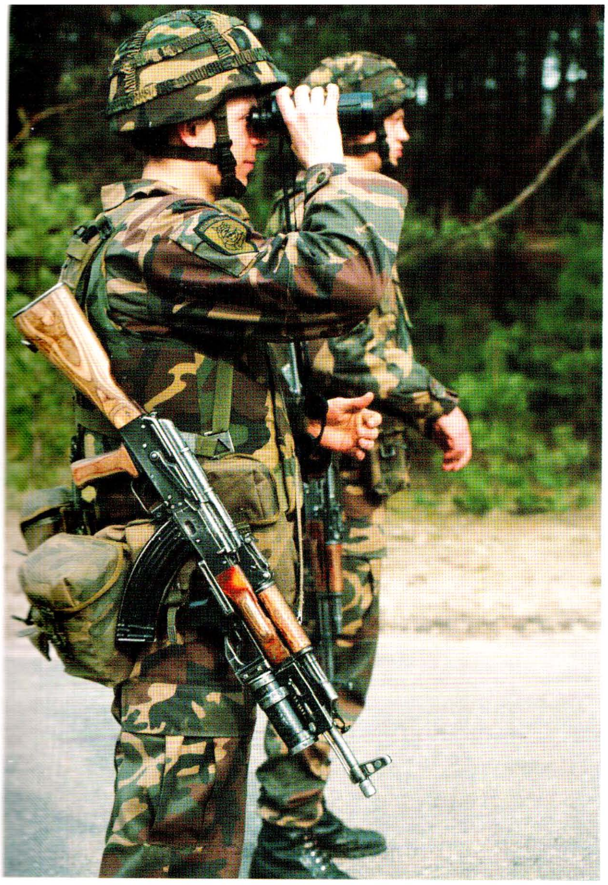
was also reinforced. In Sector "Alfa", locals found mass graves near Wedrzyn and Zagan. The sector commander sent reports of the discovery of the graves up the chain of command and PFOR secured the site.

More "Peace Support Operations" Ahead

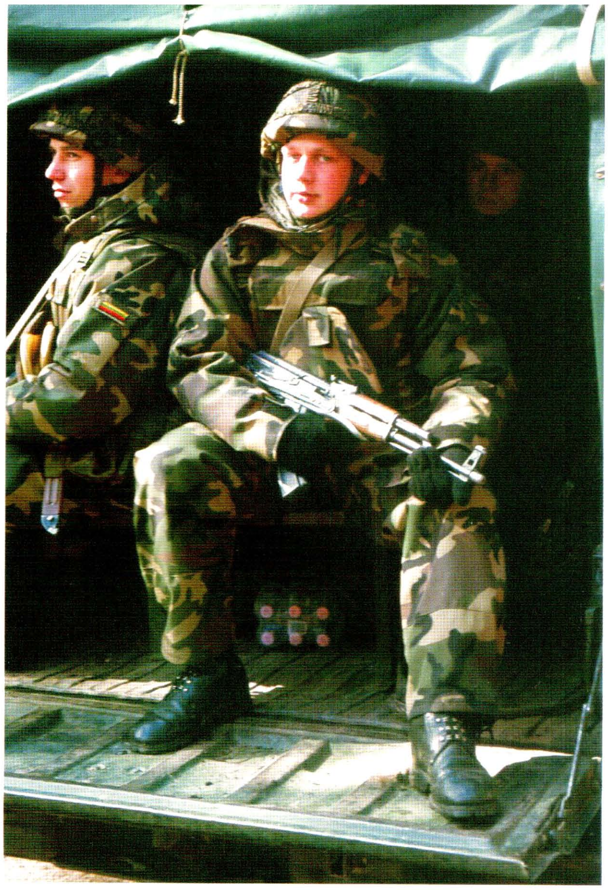
While NATO and PfP nation troops trained in Poland in March 2002, the situation in the Near East escalated further and international politicians made the first calls for an international force to end the ethnically and religiously motivated struggle between Israel and the Palestinian people. This clearly demonstrates that NATO's focus to train for international peace-support operations involving non-NATO nations is a step in the right direction.

Although NATO, together with the PfP nations, showed its capability to conduct such operations, with troops in Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Afghanistan, most NATO members have now reached a point where the large cuts in their forces in the early 1990s have taken their toll. Many feel there are no troops left to conduct and maintain future peace-support operations that might last for any lengthy period.

This soldier, who is armed with a 7.62mm AK-47 assault rifle fitted with a 40mm GP 25 Kastyor grenade launcher, belongs to a screening force provided by the Lithuanian infantry platoon during anti-riot training.

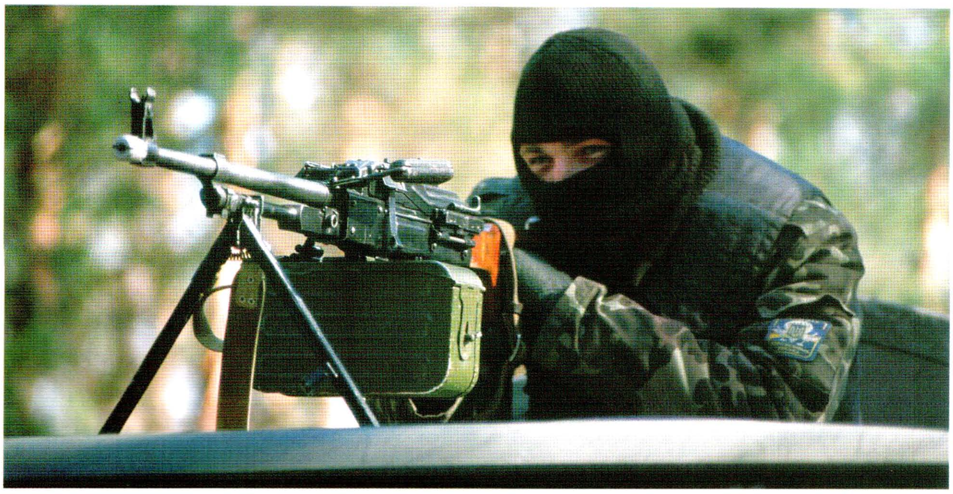


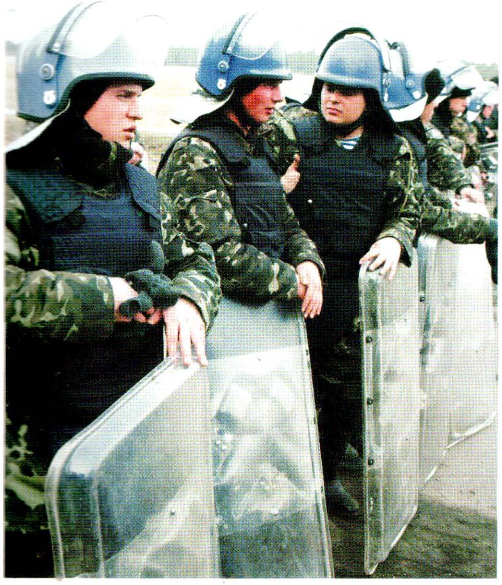
The webbing worn by this Lithuanian soldier is identical to the British PLCE system except it is manufactured in a Lithuanian camouflage pattern. The camouflage pattern is nearly identical to the US Woodland pattern but it features different colors.



Troops armed with AK-47s from the Lithuanian "Iron Wolf" Motorized Infantry Brigade sit in the back of a Blazer made by Chevrolet. Their camouflage is made in Lithuania. (Yves Debay)

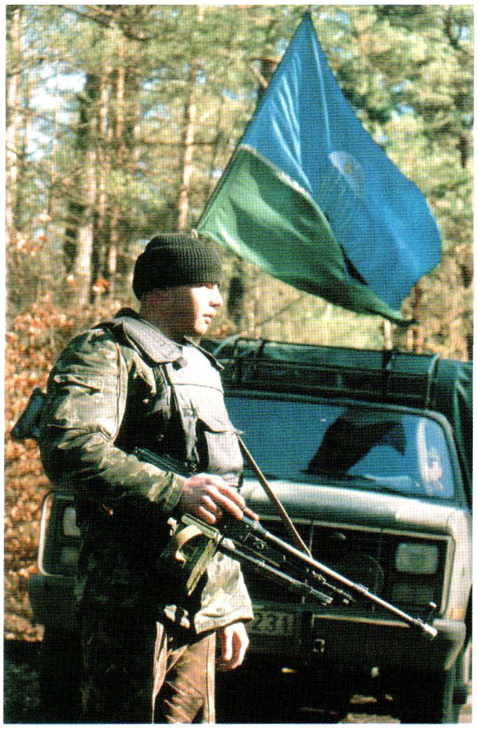
Here a Ukrainian paratrooper of the 95th Independent Airborne Brigade, a veteran of peace-support operations in Bosnia and Lebanon, is seen in position providing cover for his comrades during a mobile vehicle checkpoint operation. He is manning a 7.62mm PK light machine gun.



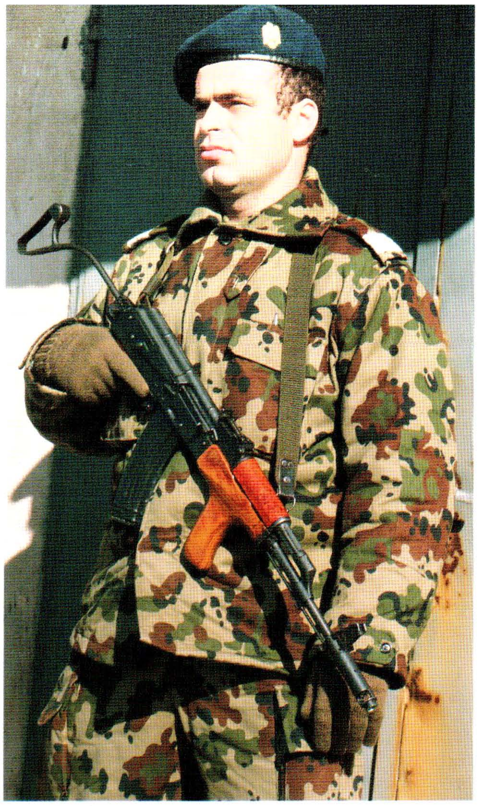


Wearing anti-riot equipment provided from the stores of the Danish Reaction Brigade, Ukrainian paratroopers take a brief rest after being relieved from their place in the front line by comrades from another platoon. During the anti-riot training of Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", troops were trained for several hours performing ant-riot duties. This involved relief-in-place operations while riots and protests were still in progress, an operation that can result in severe trouble in real life if something goes wrong.

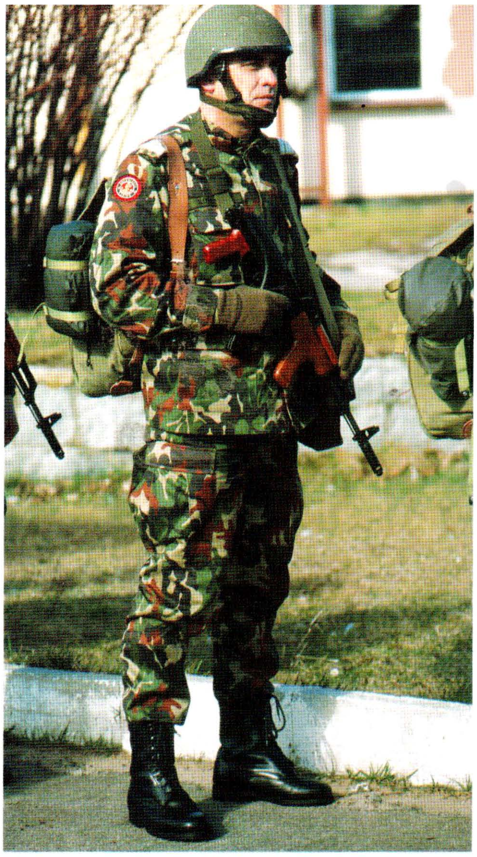
Dressed in Danish anti-riot gear, a platoon of Ukrainian paratroopers from the 95th Independent Airborne Brigade awaits the rioting crowd that is making its way to the camp of the Multinational Battalion. The soldiers, who are wearing anti-riot helmets and leg protection, carry anti-riot shields and batons.



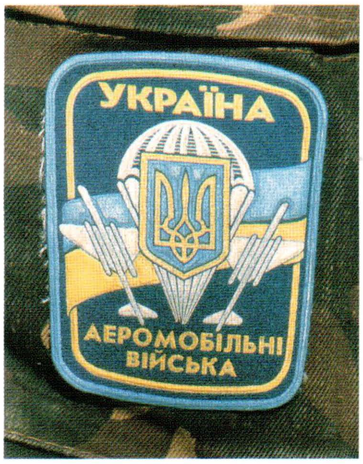
Carrying a 7.62mm x 54R PK light machine gun, a Ukrainian paratrooper from the 95th Independent Airborne Brigade watches the surrounding area while his comrades remove an illegal Treelian roadblock. The Ukrainian paratroops used a human chain and forced themselves through the checkpoint after negotiations failed. After some brief turmoil, which almost ended in a fistfight, the Treelians acknowledged their defeat and disappeared.



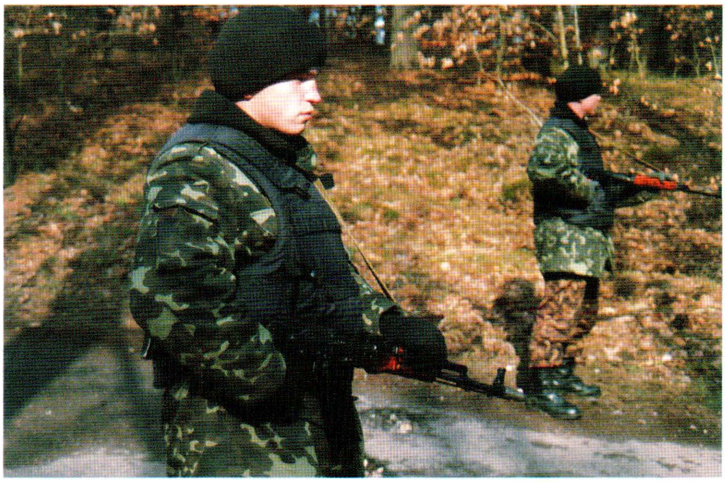
Romanian marine infantry soldiers took part in several amphibious landing exercises along the Polish Baltic Sea coast in order to back up peace-support force operations. One of the aims of these operations was to prevent extremist groups from smuggling in arms. The Romanian marine seen here wearing a beret with the national badge and is armed with a 5.56mm AK-74.



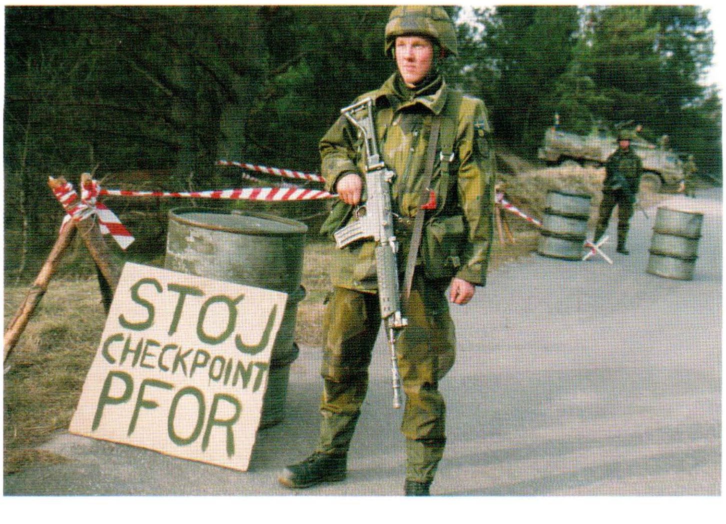
Among the troops Romania sent to Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" was a platoon of marines who operated under the command of the 2nd Amphibious Battalion from Sweden. Note the Romanian version of the 5.56mm AK-74 and the Infanteria Marina shoulder patch.



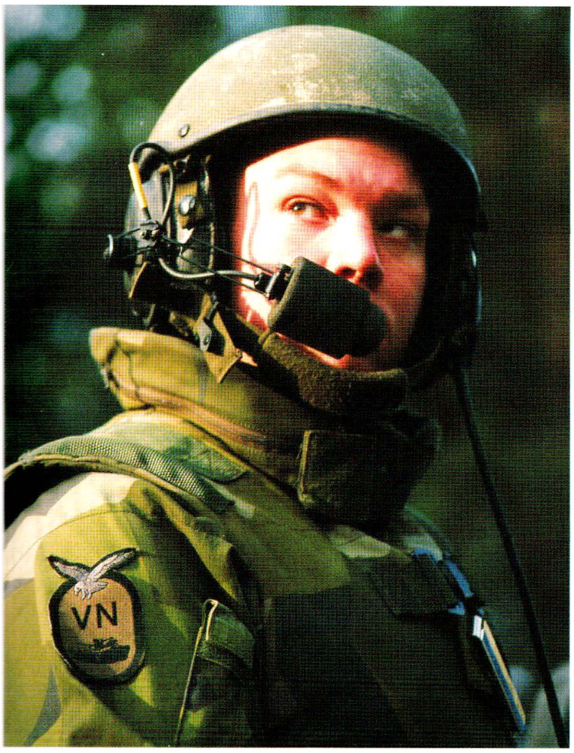
Shoulder badge of the Ukrainian Airborne Forces. The 95th Independent Airborne Brigade from Ukraine was chosen to deploy a company of paratroopers and an engineer platoon to Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002". The reason for the decision was the experience the 95th Independent Airborne Brigade had already gained during deployments of its troops to peace-support operations in Bosnia and Sierra Leone. The 152 soldiers were deployed to Poland with an Il-76 transport aircraft.



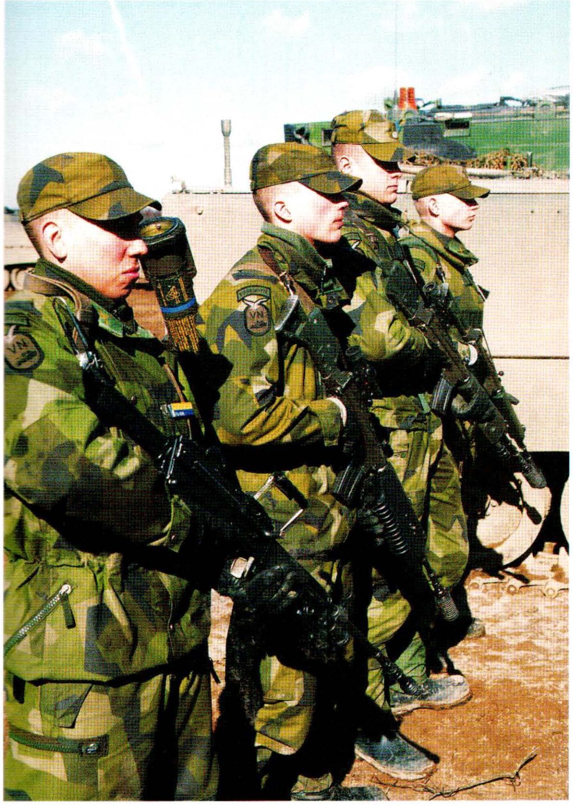
Armed with a 7.62mm Dragunov SVD sniper rifle and a 7.62mm AKM assault rifle, two soldiers from the Ukrainian 95th Independent Airborne Brigade patrol the Drawsko Pomorski training area. Note that they wear black wool caps instead of the famous light blue beret of the Ukrainian airborne forces.



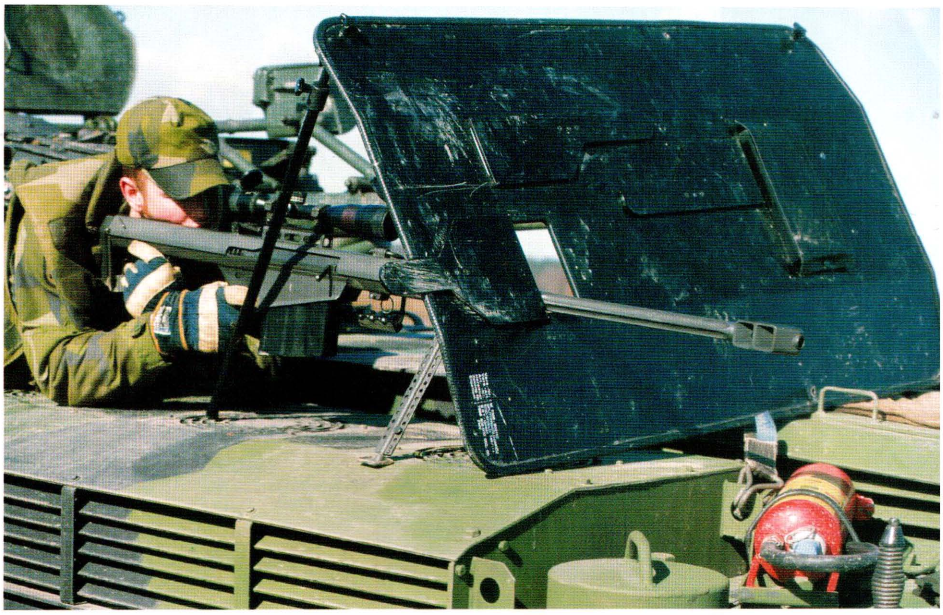
Soldiers of the Swedish Life Guards man one of the countless VCPs at the Drawsko Pomorski training area. They are armed with the 5.56mm AK-5 assault rifle, the standard weapon of the Swedish armed forces. The AK-5 assault rifle was developed out of the FN FNC and is built in Sweden. Loaded with a 30-round magazine, the weapon has a weight of 4.7kg (10.3lb).



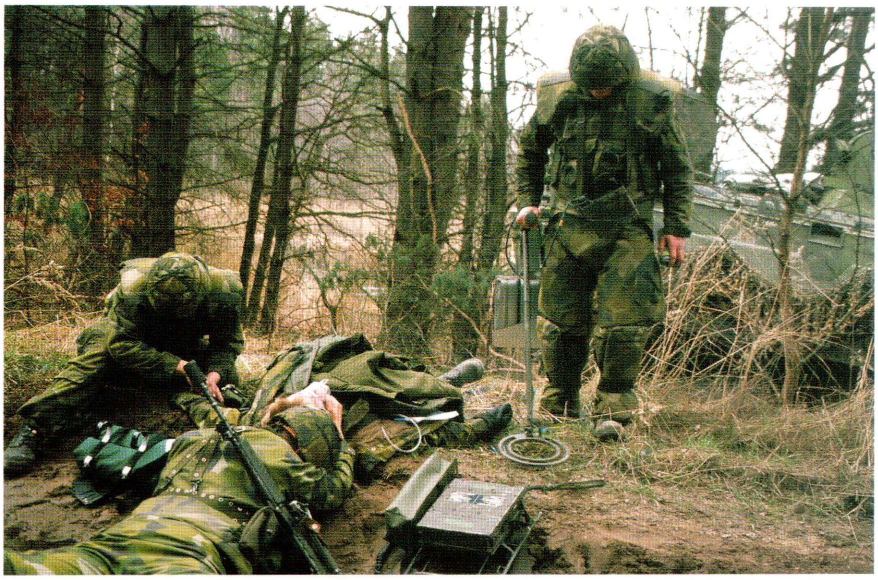
During Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", a Swedish mechanized infantry battalion became part of the Danish Reaction Brigade. The 3rd Battalion "Viktor Niklas" of the Jämtland Rifles based at Östersund formed the core of the Swedish Battalion. This battalion also consisted of troops from the following units: The Life Guards based at Kungsängen, the Gotland regiment based at Visby, the Norrland Dragoon Regiment based at Arvidsjaur, and the Swedish Helicopter Wing based at Linköping. This crewmember of a CV 9040 APC proudly wears the shoulder patch of the 3rd Battalion "Viktor Niklas" of the Jämtland Rifles.



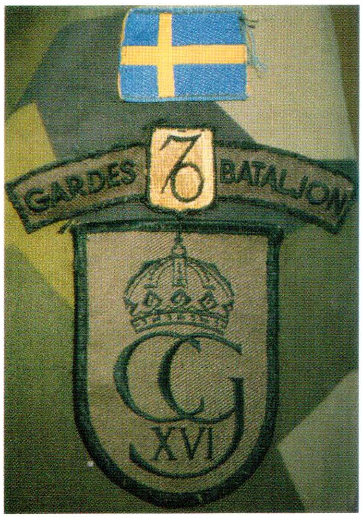
Several troops of the Swedish mechanized infantry gather behind a CV 9040 IFV. They are armed with a MINIMI and the AK-5, the Swedish version of the Belgian FN FNC. (Yves Debay)



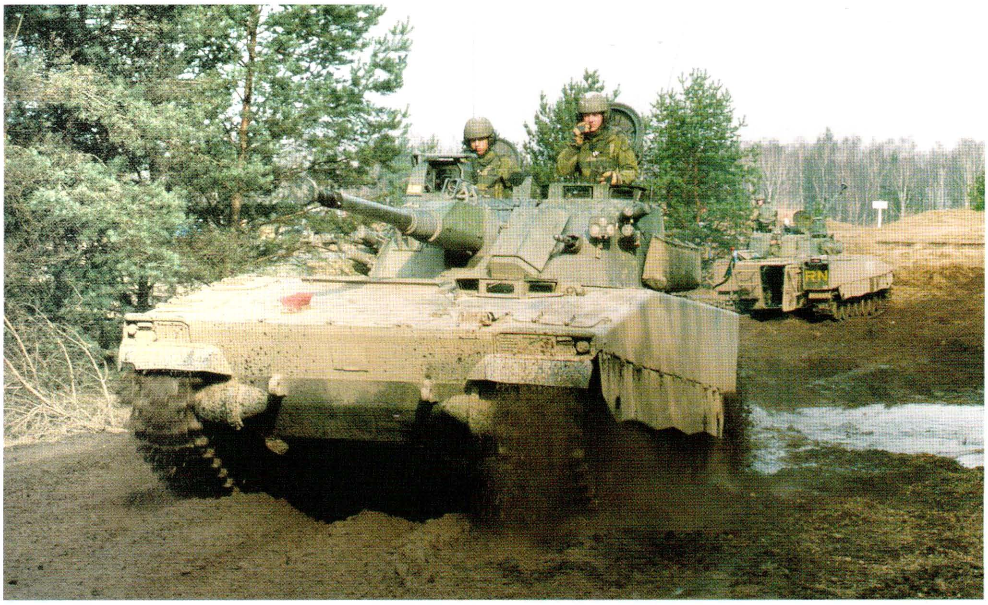
Protected by a bulletproof shield, a Swedish EOD team member armed with a .50-caliber M82A1 Barrett sniper rifle aims at a mine. EOD teams around the world use these rifles to destroy mines and other explosive devices from a safe distance. The ballistic shield that protects the Swedish soldier from the effect of splinters and shrapnel is noteworthy.



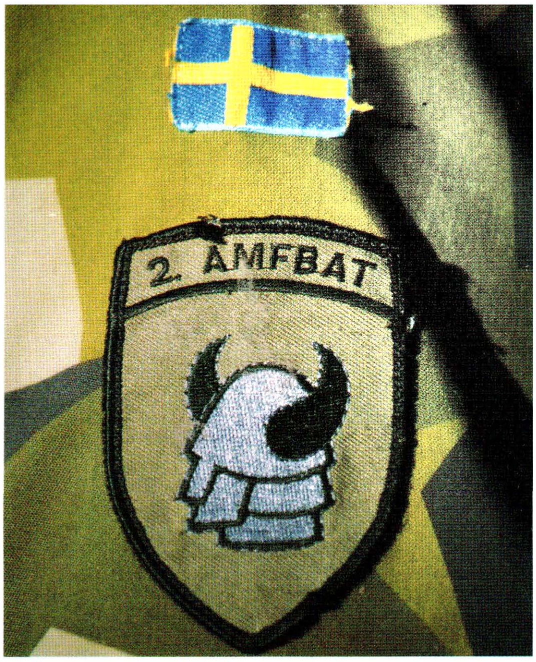
Soldiers from a Swedish EOD team rescue an unconscious victim after a mine incident. While a medic goes through life-saving drills, one member of the EOD team searches the area with a metal detector for other mines and another member uses a spike to probe close to the body of the victim. The Swedish soldiers use spray paint to mark their mine path, a clever idea that saves time and is more effective than using mine tape.



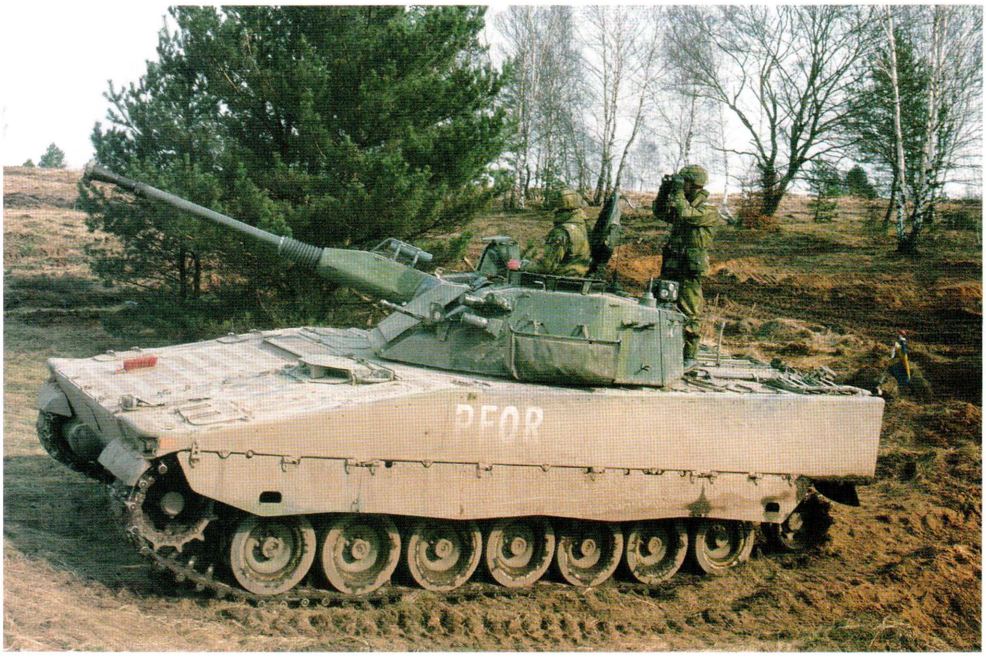
Shoulder patch of the Swedish Life Guards based at Kungsängen. The unit attached personnel and Patria Sisu XA 203 wheeled APCs to the Swedish Battalion.



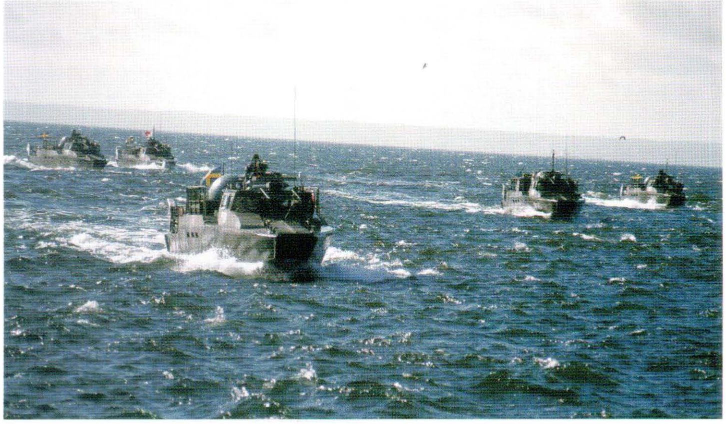
The main weapon system of SWEBAT was the CV 9040 Infantry Fighting Vehicle. Both A Company and C Company consisted of three platoons with three CV 9040 IFVs and four CV 9040 Company Battle Command Vehicles each. B Company consisted of two platoons with four CV 9040 IFVs and two platoons with XA 203 wheeled APCs, as well as two CV 9040 Company Battle Command Vehicles. Located in the HQ Company of the battalion were four additional CV 9040 Battalion Battle Command Vehicles.



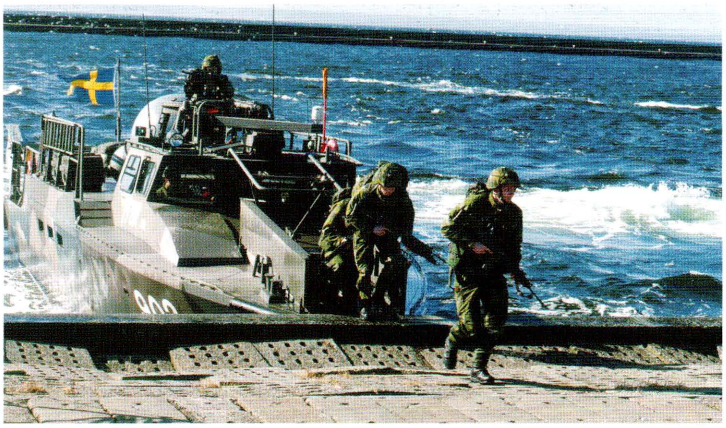
Shoulder insignia of Sweden's 2nd Amphibious Battalion. An amphibious battalion of the Swedish Army can be described as a mechanized infantry unit that uses assault crafts instead of APCs. Swedish amphibious battalions are designed to fight along the countless waterways and archipelagos that cover 60,000 square kilometers (37,260 sq.mi.) of the country's territory. During Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002", the battalion operated from the USS Tortuga *(LSD-46), a landing ship dock, and also commanded a platoon of Romanian marines.*



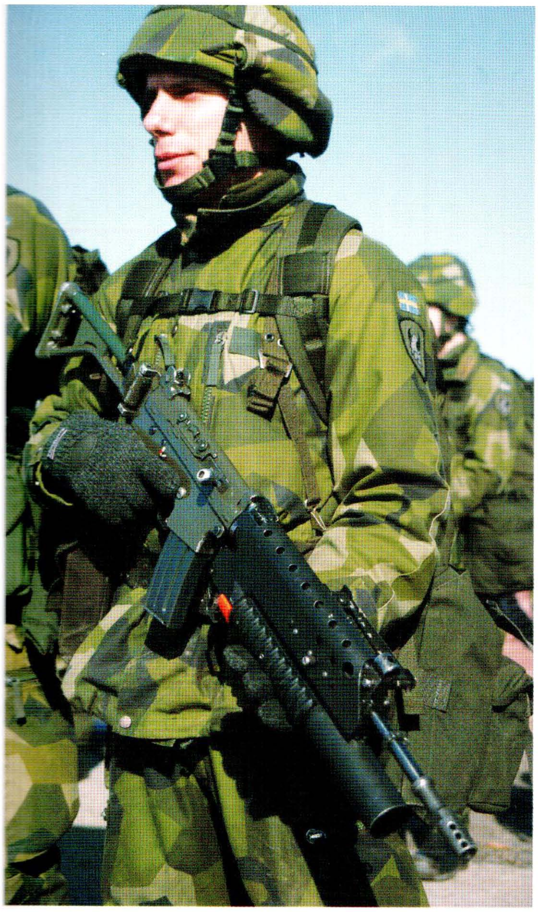
The CV 9040 IFV has a combat weight of 22.8 tons and a crew consisting of commander, gunner and driver. In the rear compartment there is space for eight fully equipped infantrymen who can dismount through a rear door. The main armament of the vehicle is a 40mm Bofors L/70 gun, and coaxial is mounted a 7.62mm M39 machine gun. Two 71mm Bofors Lyran mortars, which can fire illumination rounds, are situated at the rear of the turret. Situated at the front of the turret are two banks of three smoke dischargers each. The CV 90 vehicle family is powered by a Scania V-8 diesel engine that provides 550 hp and allows a maximum speed of 70km/h (44mph).



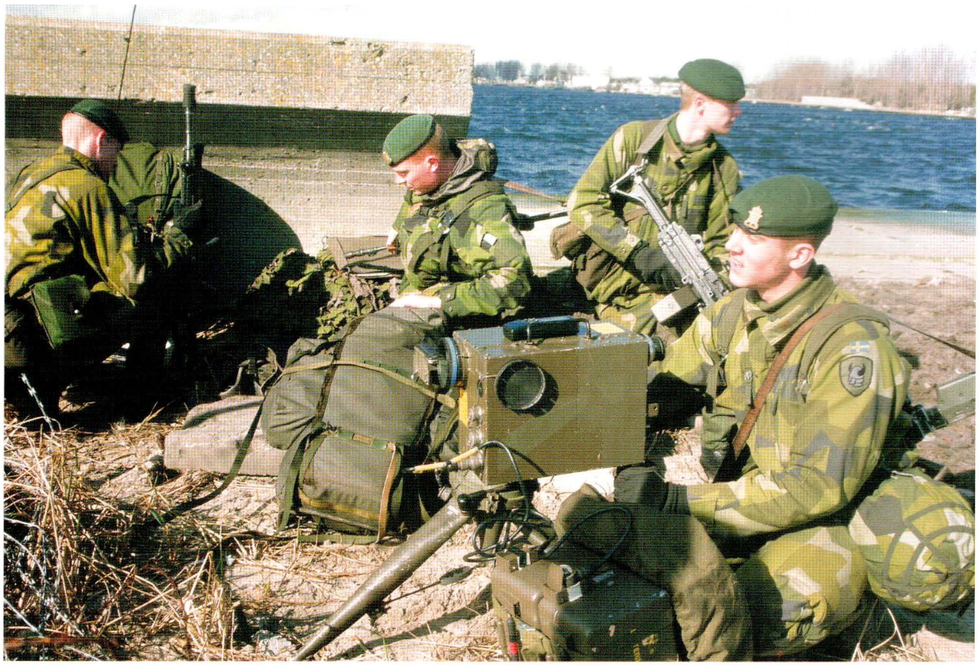
A fleet of Swedish Type 90 assault boats enter the harbor of Gdynia near Gdansk during an amphibious assault operation. While most of the vessels are of the Type 90H assault version, a Type 90E in the ambulance version can be spotted in the background. Armed with a .50-caliber M2HB heavy machine gun, each Type 90H assault boat can bring 12 to 20 soldiers ashore.



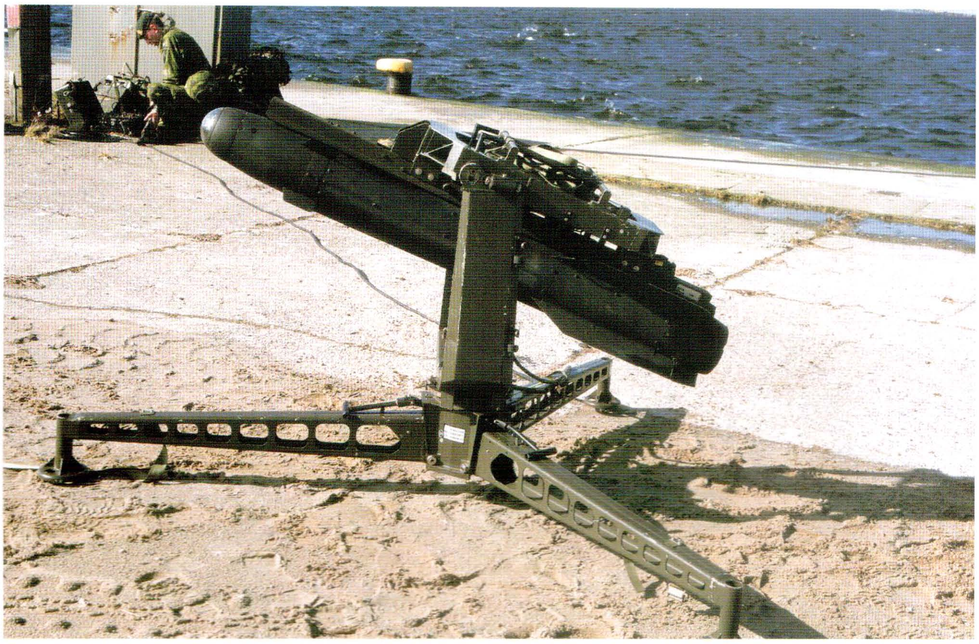
Armed with the 5.56mm AK-5, assault troops of the 2nd Amphibious Battalion go ashore in the Gdynia harbor. The troops took control of the harbor in Woodland's rear to enforce an arms embargo. The Type 90 assault boat, here in the Type 90H version, was specially designed to operate in shallow waters and is ideal for landing operations.



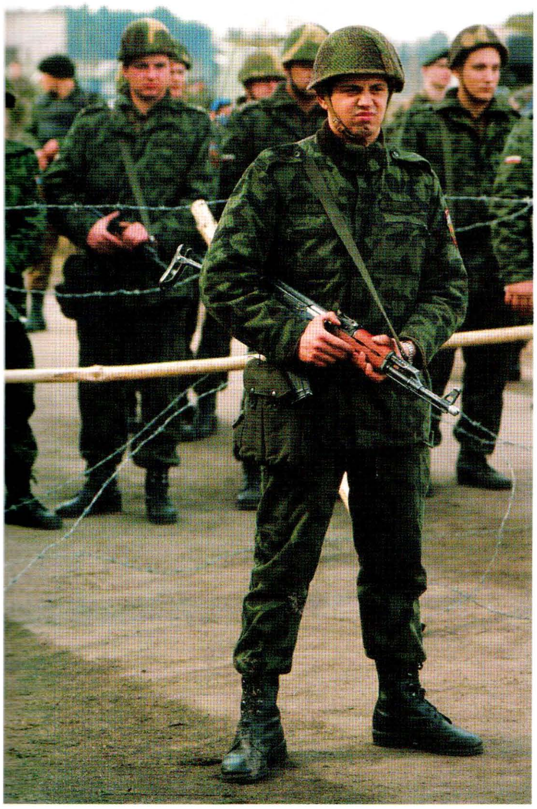
This Swedish soldier wears the Viking-helmet badge of the 2nd Amphibious Battalion on his left sleeve and carries a 5.56mm AK-5 assault rifle. The weapon is fitted with the 40mm M203 grenade launcher.



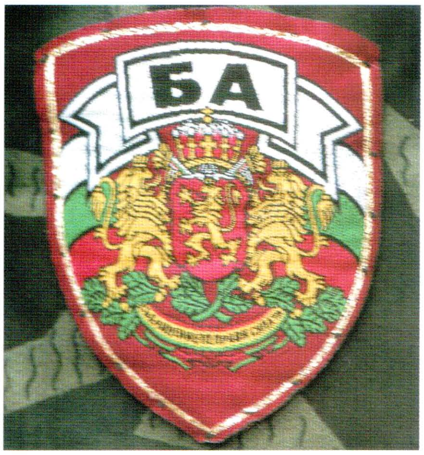
Belonging to a missile platoon of the 2nd Amphibious Battalion, a target designation section equipped with laser target designator and infrared sight deploys in Gdynia harbor. Note that the troops are wearing the famous green beret of the Swedish amphibious forces.



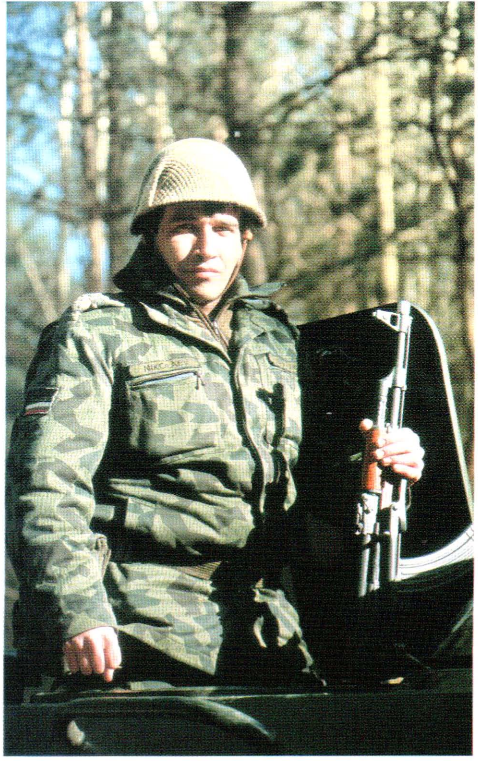
The RBS 17 is a land-based version of the "Hellfire" AGM 14 anti-tank missile of the AH-64 Apache, but the Swedish amphibious troops use the weapon mainly against ships. Members of the anti-tank platoon of the 2nd Amphibious Battalion deployed this missile just after they landed at the harbor of Gdynia. The guided missile can destroy targets up to a distance of 7km (4 miles).



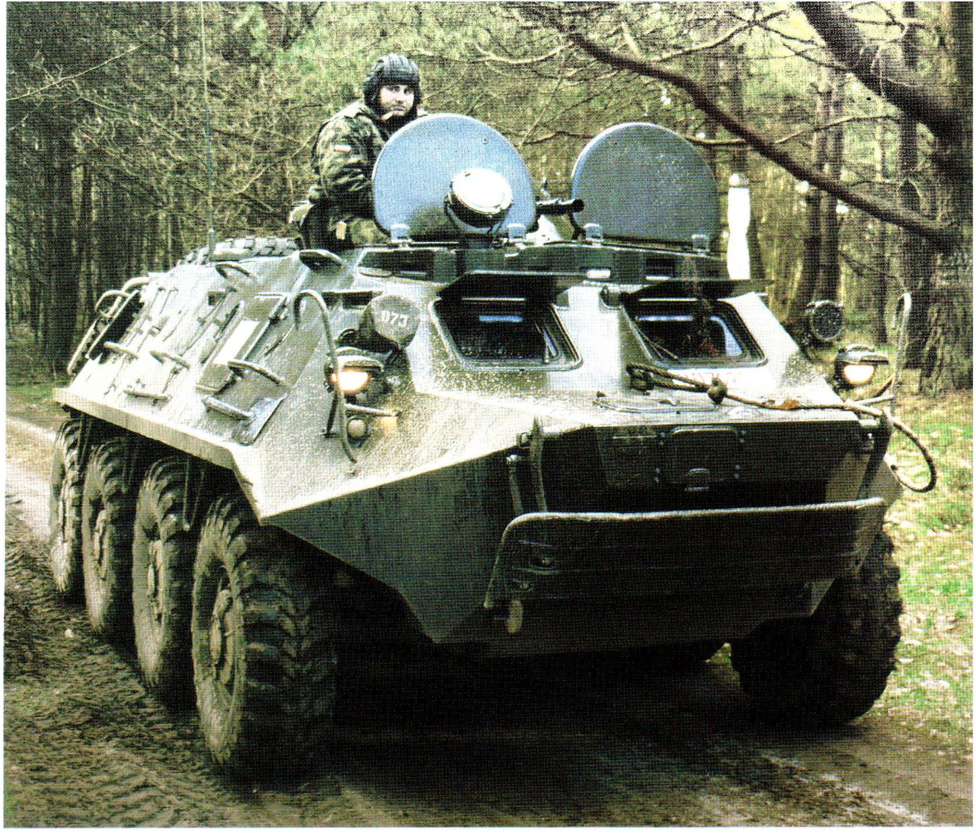
The Bulgarian platoon consisted of three officers, seven NCOs and thirty men. Some of these soldiers are seen here during a riot in front of the compound of the Multinational Battalion. They are armed with the 7.62mm AK-47S assault rifle, which is manufactured in Bulgaria.



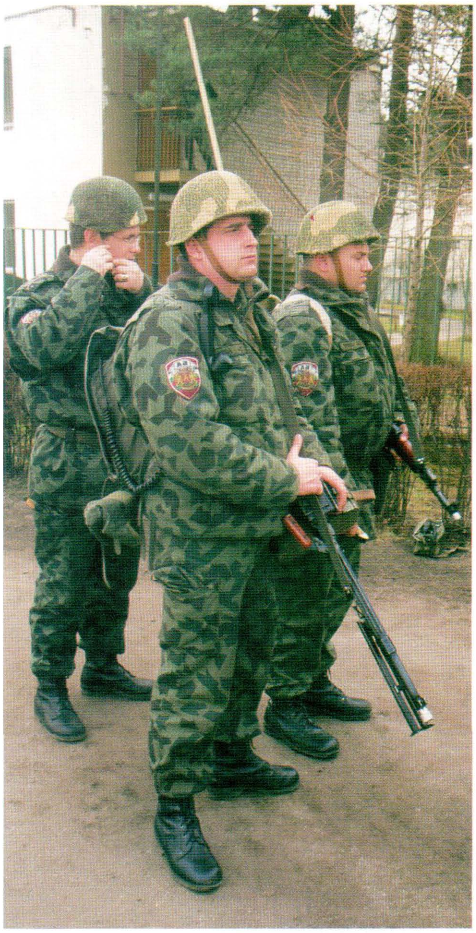
Badge of the Bulgarian armed forces' land component. Bulgaria deployed a 40-soldier mechanized infantry platoon to Poland, and the platoon became part of the Multinational Battalion of the Danish Reaction Brigade. The troops were drawn from the 1st Battalion of the 15th Mechanized Brigade, which is based in Kazanlak in central Bulgaria. Composed of three sections and a command element, the platoon fielded three BTR-60PB wheeled APCs.



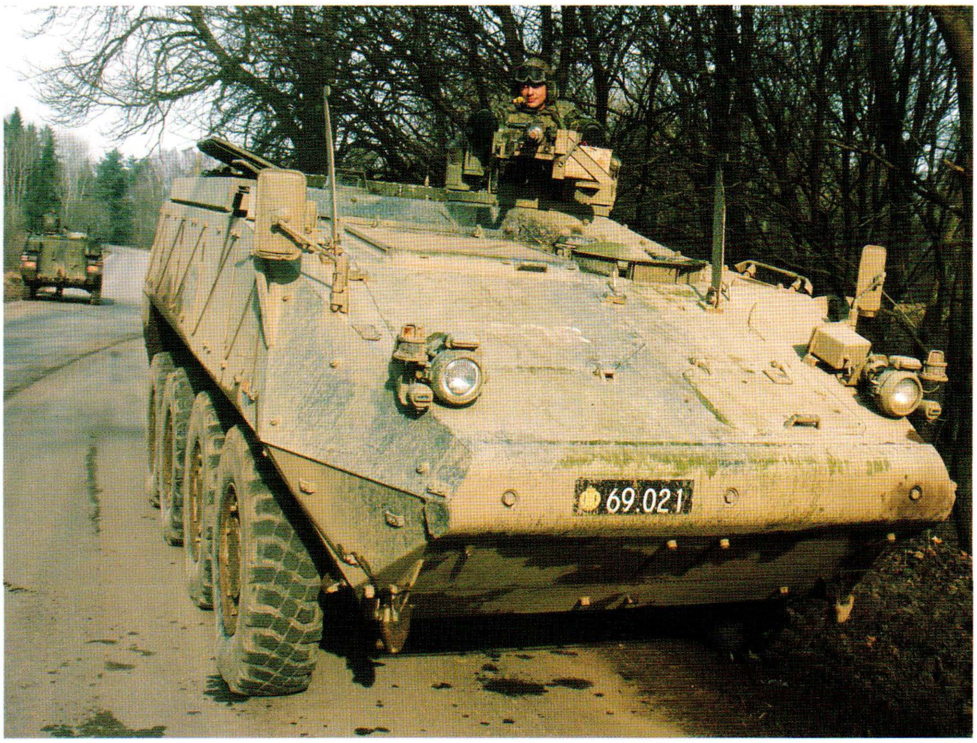
Armed with the 7.62mm AK-47S, this soldier belongs to the dismounting squad of a BTR-60PB of the Bulgarian rifle platoon. He is standing in one of the rear hatches of the wheeled APC. Since there is no rear ramp, the hatches are used for fighting when the troops are mounted and to dismount the vehicle.



Patrolling through the wooded regions of the Drawsko Pomorski training area is one of the three Bulgarian BTR-60PBs. The BTR-60PB is armed with a 14.5mm KVT heavy machine gun and a coaxial 7.62mm PKT machine gun.



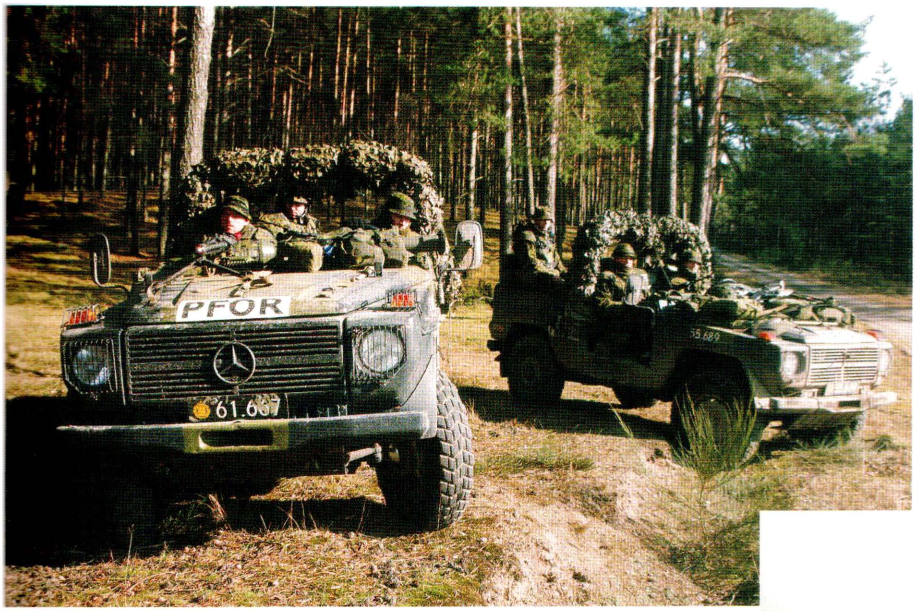
Among the weapons carried by the Bulgarian soldiers of the 1st Mechanized Battalion transported by the BTR-60PBs are a PKM light machine gun, an RPG-7 and the AK-47. (Yves Debay)



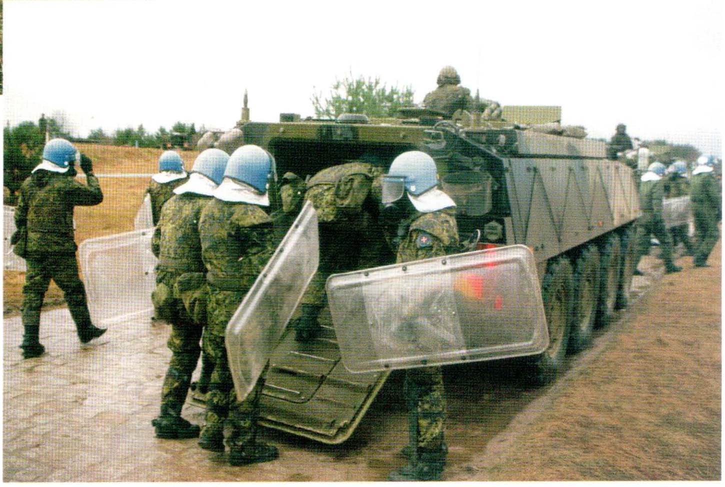
The Danish Piranha III (8x8) fleet consists of 22 vehicles, including 18 wheeled armored personnel carriers, two command post vehicles and two recovery vehicles. Eleven of these vehicles are permanently deployed with the Danish peacekeepers of SFOR in Bosnia. The remaining eleven are kept for training in Denmark and were deployed with the Danish Reaction Brigade to Poland for Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002". A 12.7mm M2HB heavy machine gun is mounted on top of the Danish Piranha III. Here two Piranha IIIs are parked on a road as a mobile vehicle checkpoint.

Armed with 5.56mm C7A1 Diemaco assault rifles, two Danish infantrymen hold their "cutoff" position while their comrades operate a VCP somewhere in the Drawsko Pomorski training area. (Yves Debay)

Photographed during a VCP operation, this Danish infantryman proudly displays the badge of the Danish Reaction Brigade on his left upper sleeve. Apart from the HQ of the Danish Reaction Brigade, Denmark deployed to Exercise "Strong Resolve 2002" the following units: a mechanized infantry battalion, a combat service support battalion, a mechanized infantry reconnaissance company, a military police company, an engineer company, a Hawk air-defense battery, an electronic countermeasures company, an attack helicopter platoon with four Fennec helicopters, and a utility helicopter platoon with two Cayuse helicopters. The Swedish mechanized battalion and the Multinational Battalion were also under the command of the Danish Reaction Brigade.

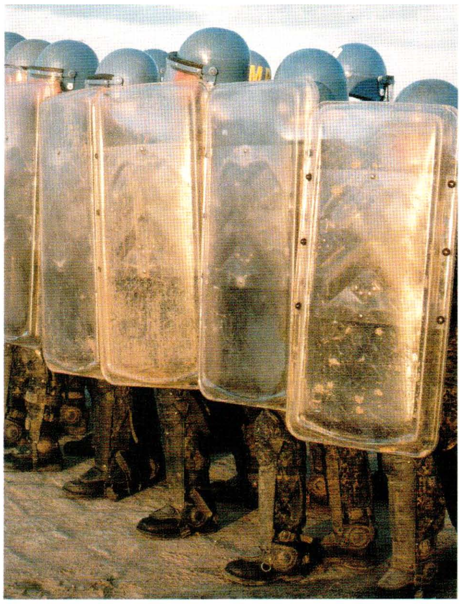


During the exercise, the mechanized infantry reconnaissance company of the Danish Reaction Brigade was provided by the Jyste Dragon Regiment and consisted of three reconnaissance platoons and the company HQ section. Each platoon fielded three sections with two Mercedes GD wagons and six soldiers. One of these sections is pictured here. Weapons used in the section include the 5.56mm C7A1 assault rifle, the 7.62mm MG62 machine gun, the 84mm Carl Gustav recoilless anti-tank weapon, and the M-84 light anti-tank weapon.

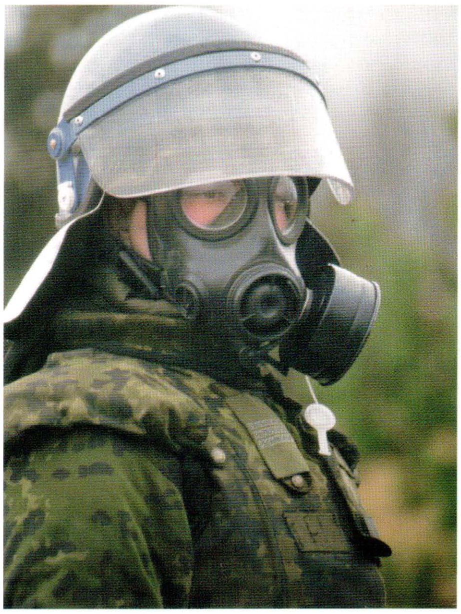


Danish infantrymen return to their Piranha III wheeled APCs after having dispersed a rioting crowd. Inside the vehicle there is space for up to sixteen troops, including the driver and commander. The troops leave and enter the vehicle via a power-operated rear ramp.

A soldier of the Jyste Dragon Regiment transmits reconnaissance results back to the unit HQ via a secure voice radio. Note the GPS system mounted on the Mercedes GD; one is fitted on each reconnaissance patrol vehicle. The light recce units of the Danish Army are well trained, and even though they mainly consist of conscripts, they can be considered a type of special forces, trained to operate on their own behind enemy lines for long periods.

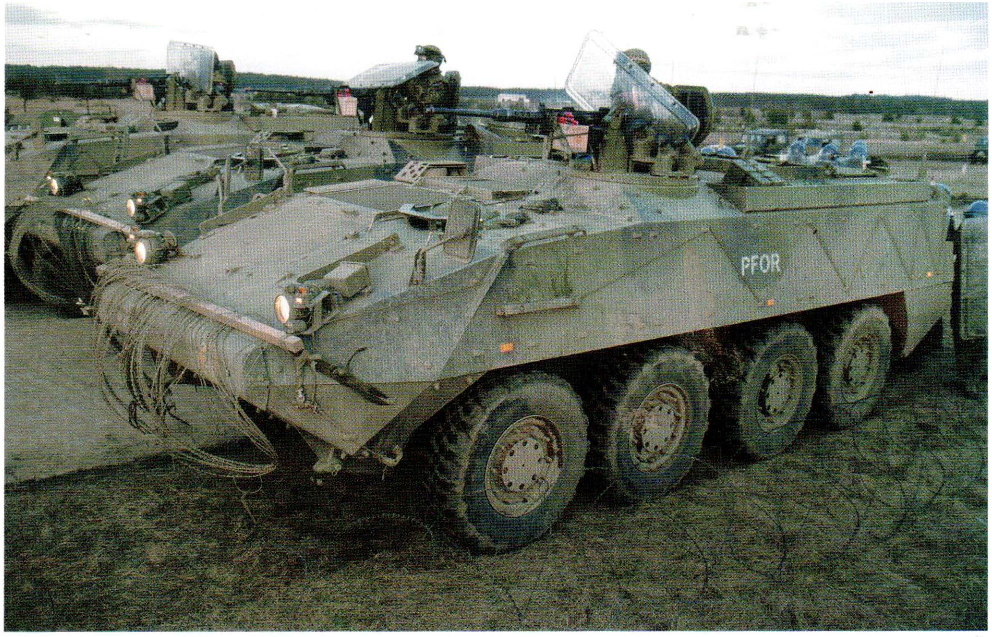


"Ready to Rock and Roll". Dressed in anti-riot equipment, soldiers of the Danish Reaction Brigade await a rioting crowd. Their anti-riot gear consists of anti-riot shield, anti-riot helmet with visor and neck protection, respirator, leg protection kit, and a baton. In the past, in most NATO nations such equipment was only available for the police forces or the military police. Since the stronger commitment of troops in peace-support and peace-enforcement missions, such equipment has found its way into the stores of regular army units in larger quantities.

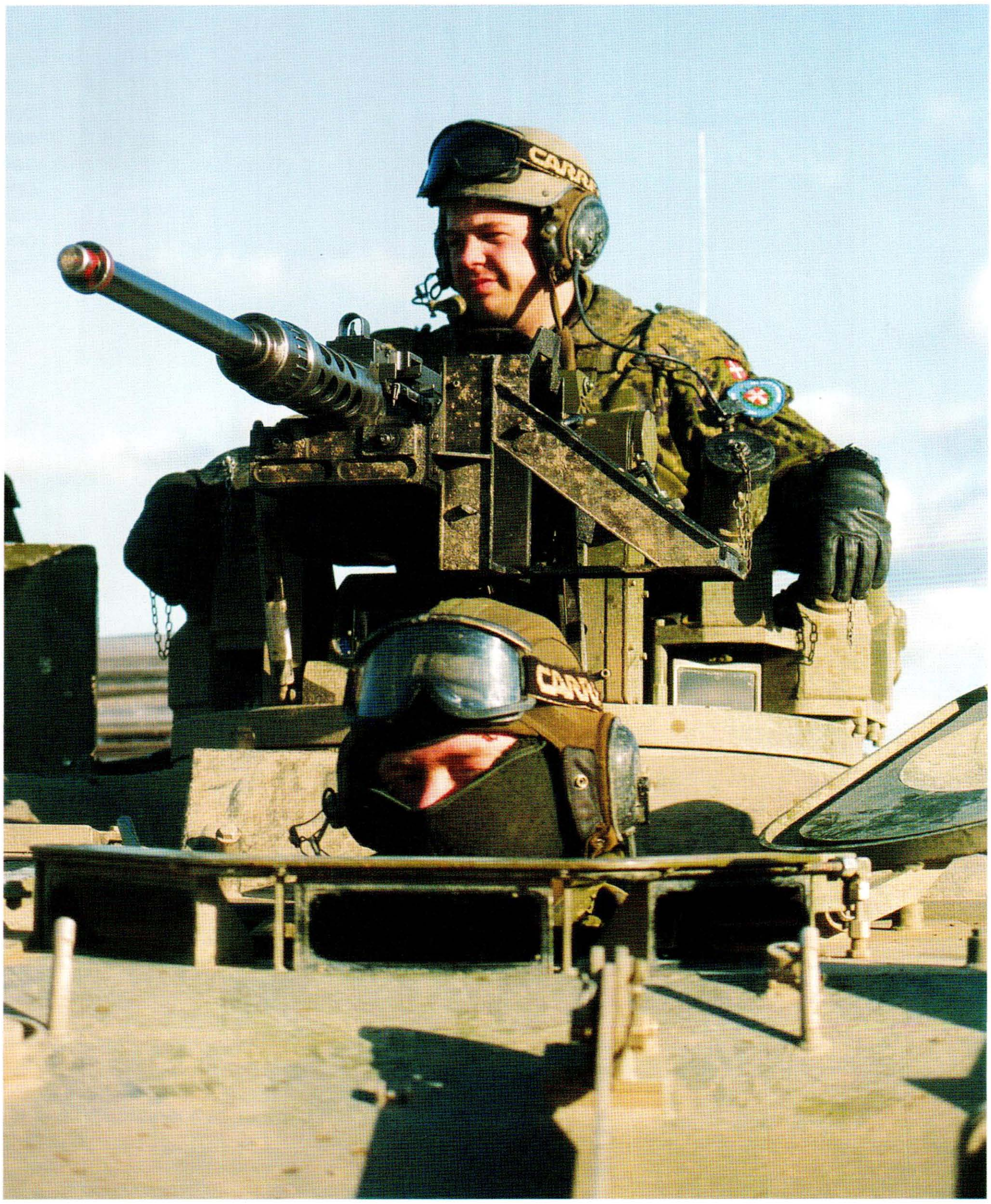


Anti-riot operations often include the use of tear gas to disperse a crowd. This Danish infantryman wears a British-made S-10 respirator to protect himself against the effect of the gas. The anti-riot helmet with visor is shown to advantage here.

The armament of the Danish Piranha III, which is mounted in front of the commander's cupola, consists of a 12.7mm M2HB heavy machine gun. Behind the commander's cupola are located six smoke dischargers. The blue Rapid Reaction Brigade patch on the commander's sleeve features the red and white national colors of Denmark



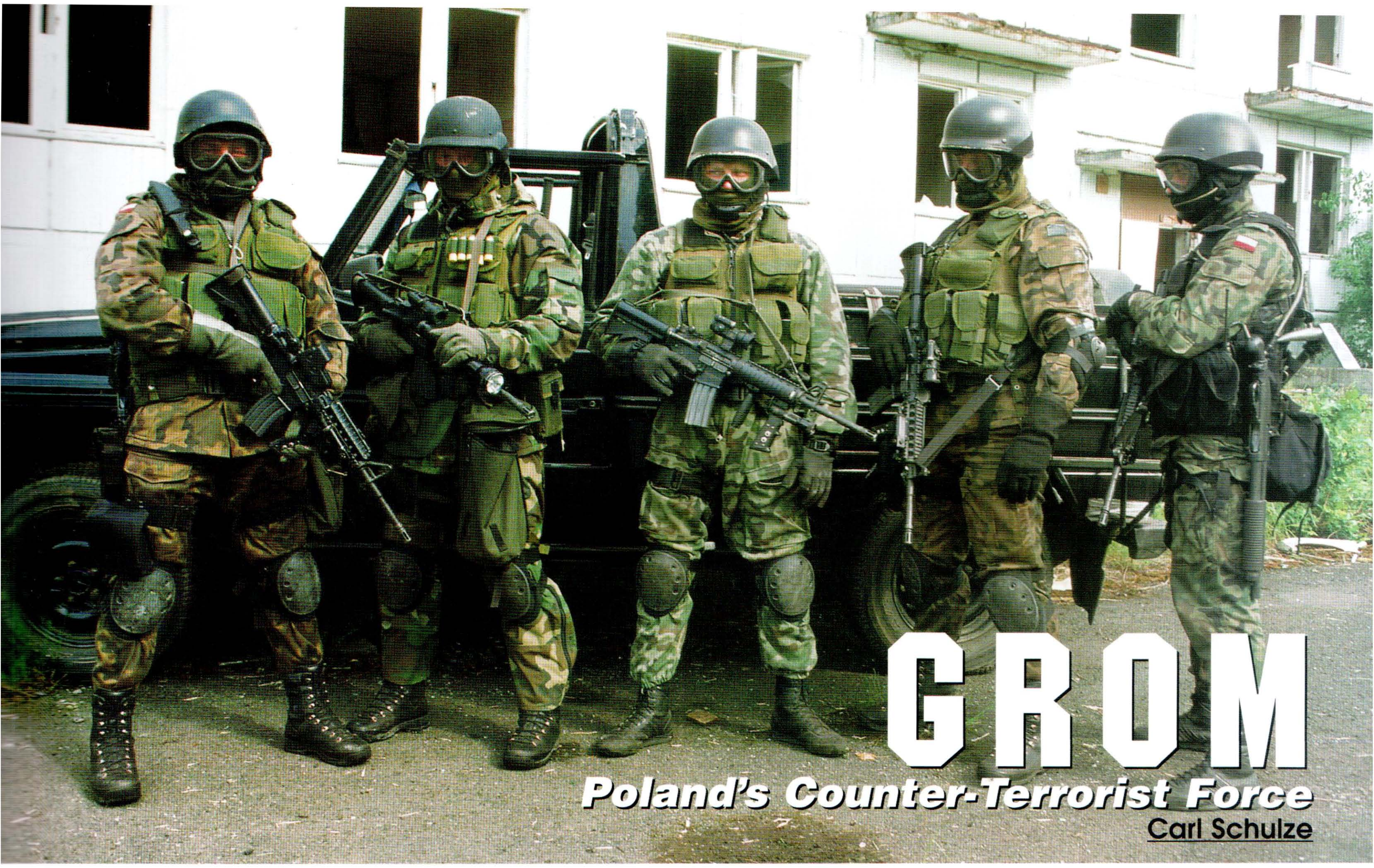
With barbed wire attached to the front of the hull to prevent people from climbing aboard, these Danish Piranha III vehicles were seen in action during training for a riot control operation. Note that the vehicle commanders use anti-riot shields to protect themselves against stones and other missiles thrown by the rioters. Besides the driver and commander, the Piranha can transport a total of sixteen soldiers. The 16.5-ton heavy vehicle is powered by a six-cylinder MTU diesel engine that provides 400hp and enables the vehicle to reach a top speed of 100km/h (62mph).



GROM

Poland's Counter-Terrorist Force

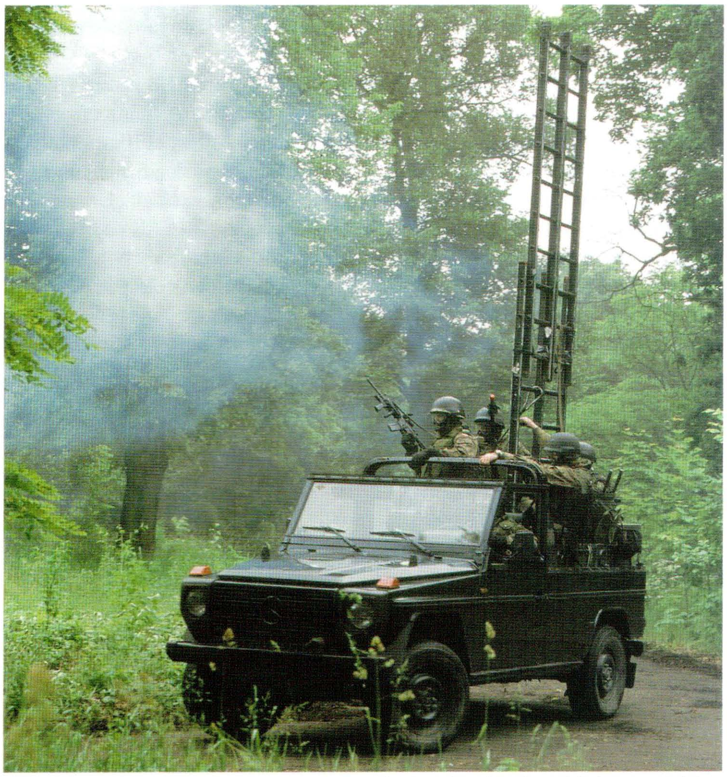
Carl Schulze



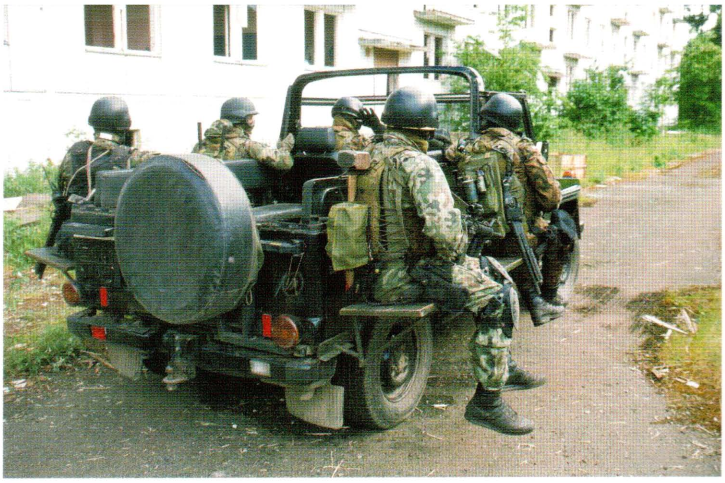
This close-up photo shows a group of GROM operators posing for the camera. Their M4A1 carbines are fitted with M68 Aimpoint reflex sights, the AN/PAQ 4A laser pointer, and the Sure Fire 6-volt tactical light. Note that the weapon in the center features two vertical foregrips, one of which contains the switches for the aiming devices. One of the M4A1s has a Maglite torch (flashlight) attached to the stock. Also visible are at least two types of ballistic helmets used within GROM, as well as the other equipment used during operations.

A group of terrorists has taken several Polish and American citizens as hostages. The terrorists have taken shelter in a large block of flats several stories high with a number of entrances. It is unknown where inside the building the hostages are being held and how many terrorists there are. However, the terrorists are violent and well armed, and negotiations have reached a point where the only possibility left to law enforcement authorities is to tell the counter-terrorist units that are already in position to storm the building. The rescue operation that follows could be exemplary. While snipers from GROM, the Polish anti-terrorist unit, use suppressed sniper rifles to eliminate terrorist sentries, assault teams approach the building from all directions in vehicles. Using Land Rovers and HMMWVs, the bi-national hostage-rescue forces, which consist of several US and Polish teams, race close to the building at high speed, leave their vehicles, and use explosive devices to blow open entrances through the front and rear doors, as well as through some windows. Simultaneously, a GROM team fast ropes onto the roof of the building from a W-3 Sokol helicopter from the Polish Air Force. Then, after blowing its way through a window on the top floor, they abseil from the roof and enter the building. For the next couple of minutes only small arms fire can be heard as the Polish and American counter-terrorist team members make their way through the building, eliminating or arresting terrorists, and searching for the hostages. Finally, the return of the helicopter to extract the rescued hostages from the roof of the building signals the success of the operation.

This is only one of countless scenarios played out by GROM and American Special Forces elements at a former Russian training area somewhere in Poland in the summer of 2001 during a regularly scheduled bi-national counter-terrorist exercise. In the following article, Special Ops will provide you with an up-to-date briefing on GROM, Poland's top counter-terrorist unit.



This photograph shows one of the tactical vehicles used by GROM, a black Mercedes G wagon, being put to use during training for counter-terrorist operations. The ladders on the vehicle allow GROM operators to enter buildings from the second floor, which is often much easier than entering a building through the basement.



During training for hostage rescue operations, GROM operators ride into action on a Mercedes G. Note that the vehicle is fitted with seating facilities on the outside in order to allow the team to leave the vehicle as quickly as possible. As many as four operators can be carried this way. In addition to the standard armament of M4A1 carbines, at least two pump-action shotguns for opening doors can be seen. The operators are also carrying stun grenades, a sledgehammer and wire cutters.

History of GROM

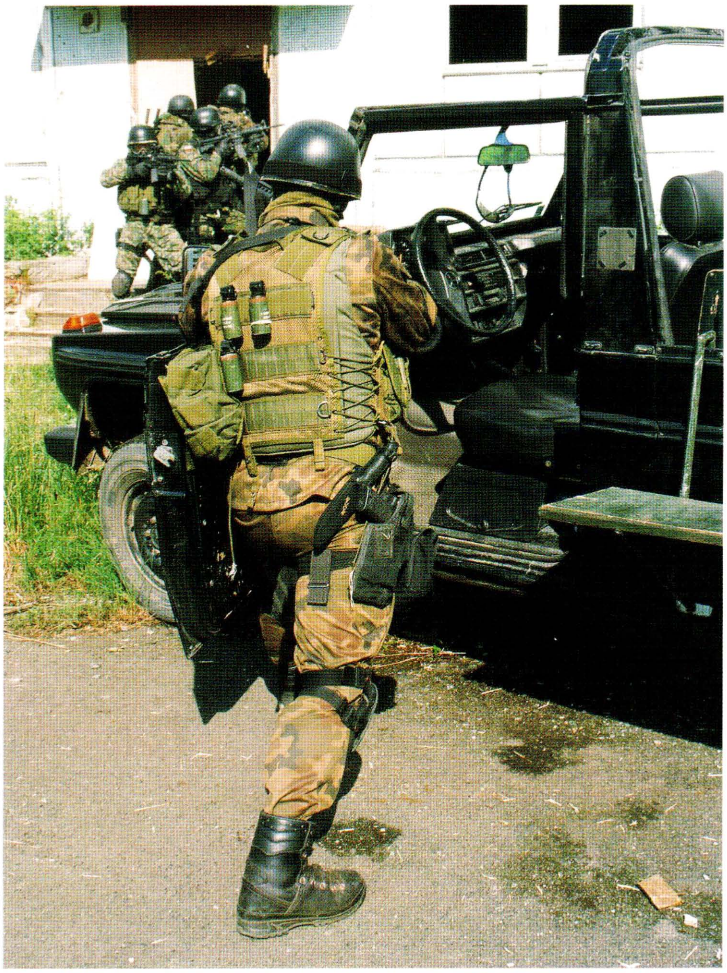
What today can be considered Poland's most capable counter-terrorist unit is just eleven years old. Everything started back in 1990 when Jewish immigrants coming from the collapsed Soviet Union traveled through Poland on their way to Israel. This large movement was noticed by Islamic terrorist organizations that planned attacks like bombings, the taking of hostages, and assaulting the Jews on Polish soil. In addition, Polish diplomats were attacked in Beirut as a foretaste of what was to come. It also became obvious that a scenario showing Polish citizens being taken hostage abroad was also a likely threat. Existing Polish counter-terrorist units like the Polish Capital Police Command Counter Terrorist Division (PCCTC) were simply not capable of dealing with these new scenarios. Therefore, the Polish government decided to seek military assistance. On 13 June 1990, the minister of internal affairs, Mr Krysztof Koslowski, officially established the *Grupa Reagowania Operacyjno Mobilnego* (GROM). Command of the unit was given to Lt. Col. Slawomira Petelicki.

The selections for the basic cadre of GROM were held in early 1991. Volunteers were drawn from the large number of existing members of the Polish army and navy special forces. Immediately after the first batch of volunteers had passed selection, instructors of the British SAS and the US SFOD-D trained them in counter-terrorist operations. Lt. Col. Petelicki organized GROM following the model of the British SAS and the US Delta Force, while the selection process was designed after that of the German GSG-9 mixed with elements from the British SAS. During the initial establishing process, officers of US Delta Force and British SAS moved to Poland and assisted the Polish Armed Forces in shaping GROM in size and structure. It was during this time that GROM became the first unit of the Polish armed forces to train together with the famous US "Green Berets". In 1994, additional training took place in St. Augustin in Germany at the GSG-9 training facility in order to improve basic skills in counter-terrorist operations.

In total, 50 GROM operators were deployed to Haiti between October and December 1994. During that operation, GROM replaced elements of the 1st SFOD-D Delta Force and the US Navy's SEAL Team "Six". Tasks given to GROM in Haiti included providing bodyguards for VIPs, operating as a quick reaction team during riots and civil unrest, as well as operating as a hostage rescue force. At least 26 people were rescued by

Speed and controlled action are both keys to success in hostage rescue operations. Here GROM counter-terrorist team members close in on their entry point after having left their Mercedes G. The operator in the foreground is carrying a wire cutter in his rucksack.

During a hostage rescue operation, GROM operators exit a Mercedes G that they have used to close in on their target. Note the seating facilities fitted on the outside of the vehicle.



While his comrades enter a building, a GROM operator using a Mercedes G for cover and a weapon rest searches the windows of the building for any type of enemy presence. Note that he carries some stun grenades strapped to his back.

Aiming their M4A1 carbines in different directions in order to best defend their counter-terrorist teammates, GROM operators enter a building. The rate of fire of the M4A1 is between 700 and 950 rounds per minute, and it has a muzzle velocity of 921m/s (3022 f/s). This gas-operated weapon, which features a rotating bolt lock, can be fed with a 20- or 30-round magazine. It features an extendable stock, which shortens the length of the weapon from 838 mm to 757 mm (33 inches to 29.8 inches) when retracted. The user can also choose between single-shot and fully automatic fire.

Close-up of a breacher from a GROM team prepared for a hostage rescue mission. In addition to his 5.56mm M4A1, he is armed with a shotgun that he uses to open doors or destroy modern windows, which can be a real obstacle during the entering phase of a mission. The crowbar he carries slung on his back is used to gain entry by force. Note that he is wearing the standard combat uniform of the Polish army under his kit.

GROM during the deployment. For GROM, the operation in Haiti was their first operational deployment, as well as the first time the unit could put its skills into practice under the eyes of the international community. Led by Lt. Col. Petelicki, the unit distinguished itself and impressed the US forces with their professionalism and abilities.

In 1995, GROM was involved in providing security for Pope John Paul II during his visit to Poland. One of the successes of GROM while operating in former Eastern Slavonia with IFOR and SFOR between 1996 and 1998 was the arrest of the Serb war criminal Slavgo Domonowich, who was accused of slaughtering 260 Croats. Colonel Sowinski, who then commanded GROM, commanded the mission. The arrest was a fine piece of work, with the criminal being taken completely by surprise and no firearms being used during the action. For both the operation in Haiti and the one in Bosnia, GROM received good rewards from the commanders of other special forces units from allied countries with which GROM co-operated. In 1998 and 2001, GROM again saw action in the former Yugoslavia, this time in Kosovo. The 2001 operation under KFOR was under the command of the unit's current commander, Colonel Polko.

Since 1995, GROM has kept alive the tradition of the Polish Special Forces of World War Two. Soldiers of these forces were trained by the British and then deployed to Poland on their own or in small groups to assist Polish resistance groups fighting the German occupation forces. On 12 February 1941, the first of these insertions took place by parachute. GROM's colors, which were presented to the formation in 1996, bear this date, along with GROM's formation date, 13 June 1990, as well as an eagle with a bolt of lightning in its claws and the words "Guard, Honor and Country." The word "Grom" in Polish means "thunder", a fitting name for a special forces unit. In addition, the four letters G-R-O-M are the beginning of the name of Gromoslaw Czempinski, who commanded the Polish Iraq mission and was a close friend of Lt. Col. Petelicki. Nothing has yet been officially stated about GROM's operations inside Poland. It is certain, though, that the formation has been used more than once to fight bands of armed criminals like the Russian mafia, who uses Poland as a transit nation to extend its influence into the rest of Western Europe. For more information on the history of GROM, please refer to Samuel M. Katz's article in Special Ops, Volume 9.

The Mission of GROM

The basic mission of GROM can be summarized in one single sentence: Protect Polish citizens against terrorists and rescue hostages. However, fighting terrorism consists of a large field of activities, so GROM's mission can be divided into the following five points:

- **Counter-Terrorist Operations:** This is the prime task of GROM, and it includes all types of tasks from hostage rescue operations and locating and neutralizing terrorist hiding spots to seizing terrorist weapon crates and arresting suspects before they can launch a successful terrorist operation.
- **Rescue Operations:** Rescuing civilians and embassy personnel, as well as military personnel, from danger. It does not matter whether the operation is conducted in a hostile or friendly country.
- **Reconnaissance:** In addition to operational reconnaissance, this point also includes the gathering of all types of information that might be needed in future operations. Information kept by GROM includes construction plans of busses, planes, underground trains, and ferries.

During hostage rescue training in an abandoned Russian barracks somewhere in Poland, a GROM team advances to their entry point while covering all directions with their 5.56mm M4A1 carbines. Note that the first team member is wearing US GoreTex waterproof kit over his standard Polish army camouflage suit.

In addition, GROM operators regularly visit places that might be suitable targets for terrorist operations. This includes airports, ports, government buildings, hotels, and various public buildings. In some cases, GROM even performs location reconnaissance. This means that GROM officers will visit a place, such as an airport, to look for all types of operational necessities, e.g., where an operational HQ could be deployed, a location from which snipers have the largest arc of fire, routes for an advance, etc.

- **VIP Protection:** GROM can offer protection to VIPs during visits to regions in crisis. Since the government has its own VIP protection unit (BOR), GROM mainly provides protection for high ranking military personnel in Poland during visits by these officers abroad and, in case of larger events, when BOR needs to be re-enforced.
- **Peace-keeping operations:** Due to its fast reaction time, GROM can be used as an initial force to project forces prior to the deployment of a larger body of troops. In addition, GROM's mission might be to re-enforce a Polish peacekeeping force or to provide protection for such a force in times of crisis.

In the maritime sector, some of these capabilities are slightly different. Due to the different environment, GROM's operational capabilities are more limited. However, with its maritime squadron GROM is able to conduct all types of counter-terrorist operations in maritime regions, on ships, oil rigs, and on shore. Insertion for missions can be accomplished by the whole range of techniques currently practiced by international special forces. These include parachuting using HAHO/HALO techniques, deploying by helicopter or fixed-wing aircraft, reaching the object on foot or by vehicle, or deploying from maritime vessels such as battleships or submarines using GROM's own assault boat fleet or diving equipment.

As one of the operators opens the door, a second operator throws a stun grenade into the room. Note the crowbar and sledgehammer that are clearly visible.

GROM can either be deployed as a whole formation or as sub-units. When deployed, sub-units such as a squadron, a platoon, or a specially designed makeshift smaller element are self-sufficient, and can therefore operate independently. In addition, these elements can either operate on their own without support of other units or form an integral part of a larger joint force including army, navy and air force components. In the ORBAT of the Polish Armed Forces, GROM is located directly under the command of the Minister of Defense, currently Mr. Jerzy Szmajdzinski.

Regular joint training of GROM and other military counter-terrorist units from the allied NATO nations is the key for standardization of operational procedures, as well as the use of equipment such as radios. Currently, GROM maintains strong contacts with the British SAS and the US Special Forces. GROM has future plans to also establish close contacts with the Norwegian *Jäger Kommando* special forces.

Structure

In modern times, the technological level and the capabilities of terrorist groups and organized crime are subject to daily changes. Therefore, a high level of flexibility is required from special forces fighting these units, and GROM is flexible. Its flexibility is shown in its formation structure, which is highly adaptable to the changing threat levels. In the past, the unit was structured in three squadrons, two counter-terrorist squadrons, with the third being a field squadron. However, GROM is currently divided into a HQ and service support element, A-Squadron, and the maritime squadron.

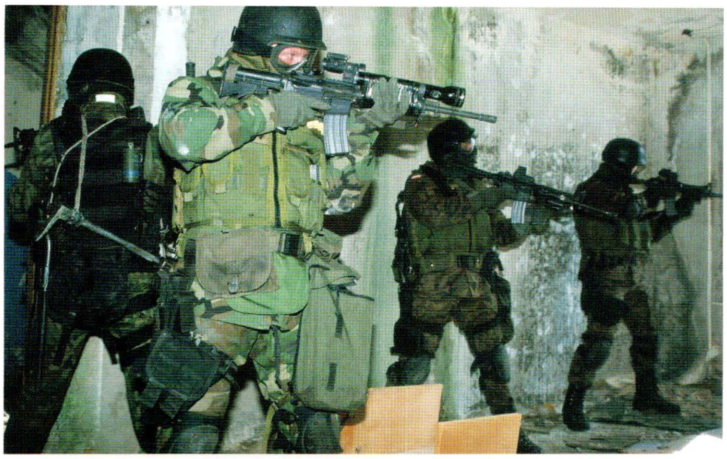
A-Squadron is the operational squadron for GROM's land operations. It consists of a HQ element, a sniper platoon, two operational platoons, an operational and training section, and a support section with breaching and medical elements. The operational platoons are divided into a platoon HQ and four sections, also known as teams, each six to eight operators strong. The teams break down as follows: commander, second-in-command, radio operator, driver, breach and pyrotechnic expert, and a paramedic. It can also contain a pair of snipers if required. The sniper platoon, which is twenty-two operators strong, includes a command element and several sniper teams.

The team enters the room while the detonation of the stun grenade confuses the enemy inside with an irritating noise and a flash of light.

After entering a building, GROM operators armed with 5.56mm M4A1s move forward to find and rescue the hostages, and to arrest all the terrorists in order to effect a secure evacuation of the hostages.

The maritime squadron is divided into an assault platoon, a support boat element, a sniper element, and a logistic and support asset. The assault platoon of the maritime squadron, which is structured similarly to the operational platoons of A-Squadron, consists of six-man sections. Usually, the maritime squadron spends several months a year at the unit's own secret training center on the Polish coast of the Baltic Sea where maritime training possibilities are excellent. The main body of GROM is based in the formation's barracks in Warsaw.

During training, GROM operators use a special explosive device to create an entry point into a building in which terrorists are holding a hostage. Most of this kind of training is conducted with live ammunition and explosives.



GROM operators participate in a hostage rescue exercise. Note the different configurations of the M4A1 carbines, combat vests, radio equipment, and helmets.

In total, GROM consists of 300 male and female operators. At any time, 50% of them are ready to deploy worldwide within 1_ hours notice. In comparison, the highest state of readiness in any army unit in Poland is 48 hours, with some small elements being on 24-hour notice. In 1994, the high state of readiness was one of the reasons GROM was chosen as Poland's contribution to the US-led United Nations "Restore Democracy" mission in Haiti. However, the current lack of sufficient air transport capability within the Polish Armed Forces puts some limitations on the possibility that GROM will participate in any worldwide operations.

Selection and Training

While Poland's army mainly consists of conscripts, GROM only accepts long-serving professionals who have all volunteered to join GROM. Most of these volunteers come from other special forces units

Once they have entered the building to rescue a pretend hostage, the GROM operators will be free to use their weapons. Just like members of other counter-terrorist units around the world, GROM operators usually fire several thousand rounds during a year of training.

During routine training, GROM operators of A-Squadron practice entry drills using an explosive device. Prior to the time this photograph was taken, the team's breacher had placed an explosive device on the door while his comrades, who scan the windows of the building for a terrorist sentry, provide cover for him. With the explosion having knocked the door to the building out of its fittings, the rescue team is now free to enter. Speed is the key to success in hostage rescue operations. The GROM members have to use the moment of greatest surprise to neutralize the terrorist and safely rescue the hostages.

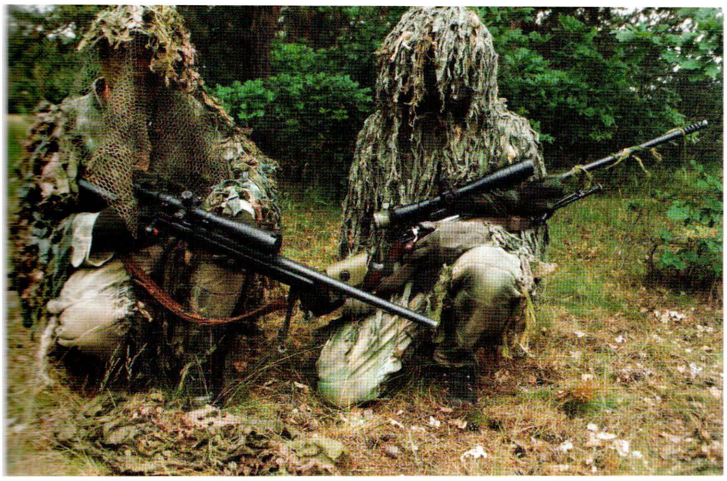
within the armed forces, such as the 6 *Brygada Desantowo Szturmowa* (Airborne Brigade) or the 1st Special Regiment. Volunteers from Polish special police units are also accepted. If people with special skills are required, it is also possible to recruit volunteers who have never been in the military directly from a university, e.g., doctors or computer technicians.

The ideal GROM recruit should be between 25 and 30 years old, so that soon after his 30th birthday he reaches operational standard. Usually this age guarantees that the recruit has some military experience, has learned to master his life, and has formed social bounds, that is, he has married and has established a circle of friends, which makes him reliable and loyal. In addition, he should have the ability to be content with a minimum of comfort and in whatever situation he may find himself during an operation. Apart from reliability, confidence and self-control, GROM is also searching for a high level of intelligence in its recruits, in combination with the ability to work in a team or alone, if necessary, to ensure that a mission is successful. Trigger-happy Rambos have no chance of becoming a member of GROM.

As one GROM operator prepares to open the door to the building, another stands ready to throw a stun grenade exactly at the moment when entry is made.

Just seconds before a GROM team enters a building in order to arrest some terrorists during a training session, the team members can be seen in their ready positions. Armed with the 5.56mm M 4A1 carbine, the operators wear body armor and tactical vests. Additional equipment includes a 12-gauge shotgun, stun grenades, a sledgehammer, and a crowbar. Most of the team members wear additional knee and elbow protection.

Whatever background and age the volunteers may have, before they can join GROM they must pass a series of rigorous tests. These tests are basically a combination of the selection tests given by the British SAS, the US SFOD-D and the German GSG-9 mixed together and adapted to Polish habits and scenarios. In its initial role, GROM was specially designed to perform as a counter-terrorist unit using "black tactics", and the selection course was designed to find the required personnel for this. However, the scope of GROM's field of operations has constantly widened, first by maritime operations and later by field operations. This has also led to a change in the selection process. Today, the first step a potential GROM recruit must make is to pass a basic test, which contains an IQ test, an extended medical test, a psychological test, a security check, and a physical test. The physical test requires the candidate to finish a 3-km (1.8-mile) run in less than 12 minutes, swim 50 meters (55yards) in no more than 45 seconds, climb a rope, complete a 10x10-meter run in no more than 30 seconds, and do 70 push-ups in two minutes. After the volunteer has passed this first group of tests, he will take part in the so-called "Test of Truth". This is held in the mountainous regions of southern Poland where the volunteers are sent on an endurance march. During this test they wear full combat kit, have to march long distances for several days, and cope with challenging tasks. Physical and psychological pressure is created to challenge their will to continue.



Here a couple of snipers pose with two different types of sniper rifles used by GROM. The sniper on the right is equipped with the 7.62mm SP66 sniper rifle made by Mauser in Germany. Using the Mauser short-action bolt, the SP66 has a three-round integral magazine. The weapon carried by the sniper at left is a 7.62mm Remington M700 sniper rifle with a McMillan stock. Both weapons are fitted with Leupold telescopic sights.

Members of a GROM sniper team await their target in a well-camouflaged position. While the sniper is looking through his sight and scanning the scenery close to the point where the target is expected, the second team member provides close protection. In this case, he is merely observing the ground next to the sniper team's position. In wooded areas, an enemy can appear suddenly from behind some trees or out of dead ground.

Volunteers who pass the test and are accepted will begin their life in GROM with twelve months of basic training, which includes training in all types of missions and environments. During the training recruits display their ability to cope with all the scenarios presented, and their instructors constantly watch their performance. If the conclusion is reached that a recruit is not suitable to become a GROM operator, he will be removed from the course and returned to his former unit. Following basic training, the future GROM operator is sent to parachute qualification training. If he fails this course, his possibilities in GROM are limited since he must be parachute-jump qualified to become a member of the operational squadrons.

The parachute course is conducted by GROM's own instructors in co-operation with the Airborne Forces Training Center at Olesnica. In the basic parachuting course, the recruit has to make five static-line parachute jumps, one of which is made under combat conditions with full combat equipment, weapon and rucksack. During basic training, the recruit mainly learns the basic individual counter-terrorist skills, whereas in the following course of special skill training, the recruits form teams, which might easily be the teams they work in once they became operational operators. The level of training is now raised, missions are more complex, and training often takes place on a larger scale.

In total, the training to become a fully operational GROM operator takes approximately three years. During this time, the recruit has trained under realistic conditions most of the time, with the training involving a vast amount of live ammunition and explosives. Several times during these three years, exercises are held at locations such as ferries and oil rigs in the Baltic Sea, on trains, aircraft, and busses, or in public buildings.

Once a GROM operator reaches operational status, his specialization work will start. He will then take part in special skill courses such as the shooting instructor course, electronic device course, security driving course, mountain and arctic warfare course, free-fall, HALO and HAHO parachuting, and a paramedic course. GROM operators often attend courses offered by civilian institutions, and it is a common practice for GROM operators trained as paramedics to ride in Warsaw ambulances. All GROM operators also learn foreign languages. At a minimum, courses in English, French, and Russian are offered. Each of these languages is taught in a six-month course consisting of 500 hours of lessons, which is followed by at least one advanced course.

If an operator wants to serve in GROM's maritime squadron, he has to volunteer to do so and pass an additional medical test, which focuses on the operator's health as far as it concerns diving. GROM officers are regularly sent to courses taught by members of foreign special forces such as Britain's SAS, Germany's GSG-9 or the USA's SFD-D. GROM operators are also regularly sent abroad to take courses on foreign radios and other communication equipment. This training is becoming more and more important. In modern operations, communication is a core

Covering a hostage rescue operation, a GROM sniper is seen in position in an urban area using the garden in front of a building to blend in with the scenery. He has not yet added natural camouflage material to his ghillie suit. Once that is done he will be virtually invisible.

This unusual photograph provides a good view of what a sniper sees just seconds before neutralizing an enemy he has successfully stalked. This picture was taken at a much closer range, but GROM snipers are able to engage targets at 800 meters (874 yards) with 100% head shot first-hit ability.

Close-up photo of the head of a well-camouflaged GROM sniper. Like snipers all over the world, GROM snipers also wear special camouflage suits known as ghillie suits.

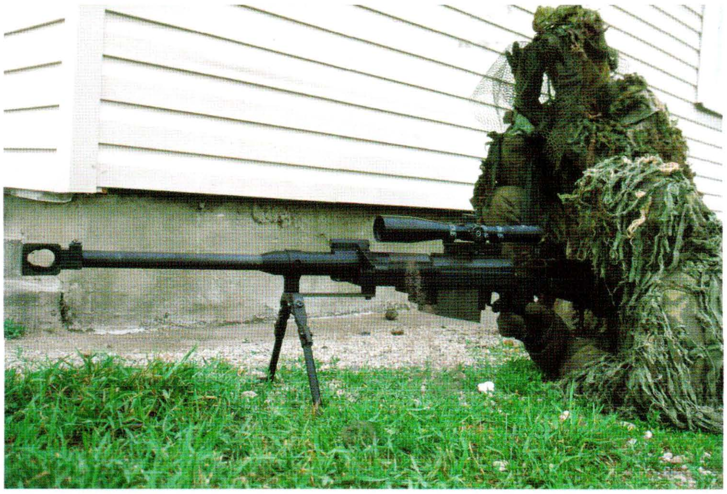
requirement of success, and an operation can become especially difficult when it involves forces from other nations.

All operational personnel in A-Squadron and the maritime squadron are parachute-trained. Of the rest of the personnel, 80-85% are qualified in parachuting. All qualified parachuting personnel have to perform five refresher jumps each year in order to retain their qualification; instructors have to make at least 20 jumps. Usually GROM operators make about 100 parachute jumps a year.

Female Operators

In the world of special and counter-terrorist forces, GROM is one of probably only a few formations that have females in their rank and file. "Sometimes women are a benefit in operations, for example, when operating in civilian environments, where two well-trained men attract more suspicion from a terrorist sentry than a couple," a GROM spokesman stated. "Our female operators have to pass the same selection and tests as their male comrades. Like the men, women have to do basic training, pass diving and parachuting, as well as go through their specialization training for a certain skill. Most of them are qualified as parachuting, mountain and arctic warfare, or shooting instructors." He concluded by saying, "Female operators are mainly recruited from police units and special services of the government, but some have also volunteered directly from civil institutions."

When the author visited GROM during summer 2001, he was present during a boarding demonstration by GROM's maritime squadron in which female operators took part. He did not notice this fact until after the demonstration when one of the operators was ordered to take off the balaclava and helmet and displayed a beautiful face and long, shoulder-length blond hair. From time to time GROM even forms sections entirely out of women for special tasks such as VIP-protection missions.

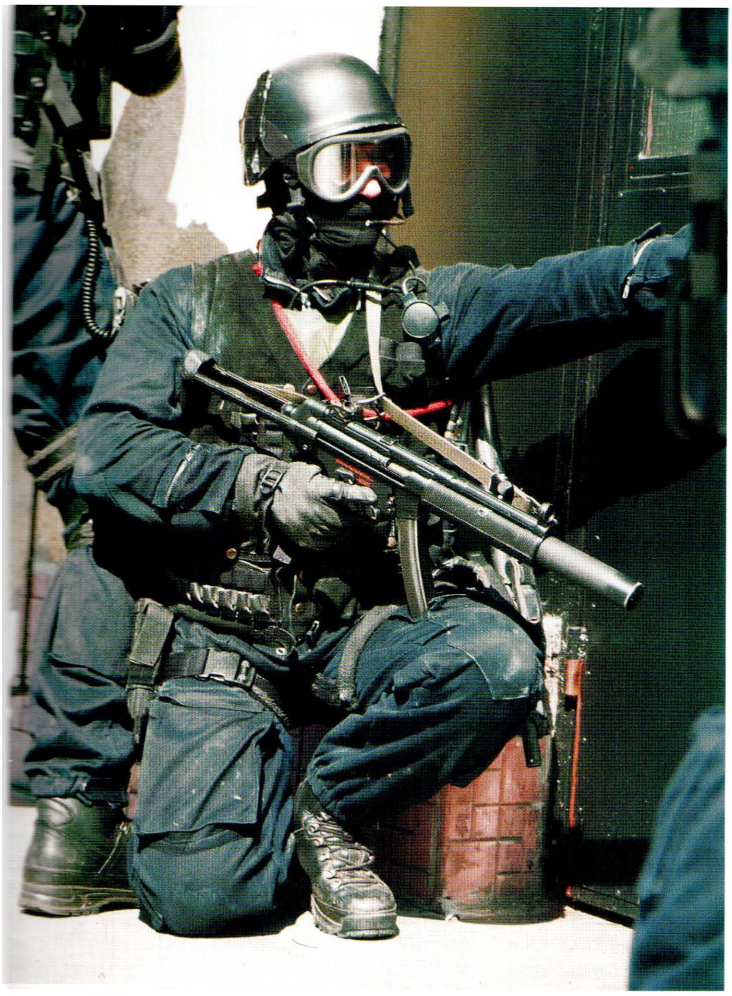


The .50 PGM Hecate II heavy sniper rifle features a very effective muzzle break that reduces the stress and strain usually faced by the person operating weapons of such a hefty caliber. The weapon has a muzzle velocity of 290m/second (952 f/s), a weight of 13.4kg (29.5 lb), and a magazine capacity of seven rounds.

From East and West : Weapons of GROM

When GROM was formed, its equipment was selected to be compatible to operate along with that of other western counter-terrorist forces. Therefore, a large amount of equipment used by GROM today was purchased from the USA or Germany. However, GROM's arsenal contains a vast variety of common and uncommon weapons used by armed forces in both the East and West. During the author's visit, a GROM operator stated, "We try to be equipped as well as possible. This means we test a lot of weapons and equipment in order to find out which is the most suitable for us." For example, GROM has access to the full range of handheld weapons used by the Polish army. Among these are the 9mm "Glauberyt"

GROM team members dressed in "black tactics" counter-terrorist kit of the maritime squadron take up their positions prior to entering a building. In their holsters they carry a sidearm, in this case the 9mm USP Heckler & Koch pistol.

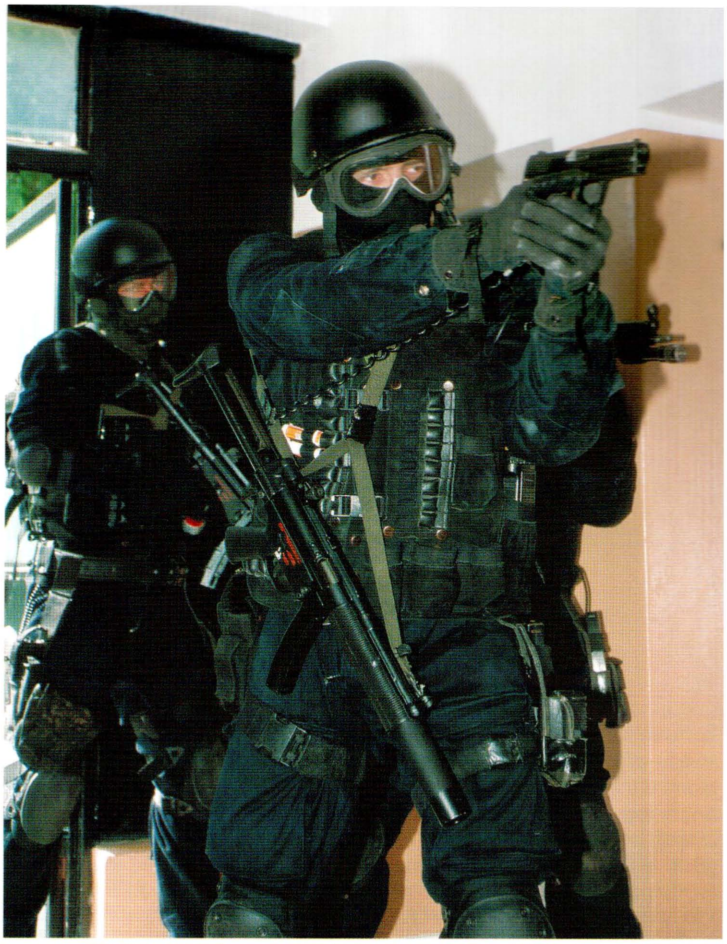


A GROM team leader in the uniform worn by members of the maritime squadron during counter-terrorist operations. Over a flame-resistant NOMEX suit he wears body armor and a black tactical vest. Weapons carried are the 9mm MP5SD6 submachine gun and the 9mm USP pistol. Note the helmet is fitted with communication equipment and protective goggles.

submachine gun, the 5.56mm "Beryl" assault rifle (some of which are fitted with a 40mm PALLAD grenade launcher), the 7.62mm SWD sniper rifle, the 7.62mm PK/PKS general purpose machine gun, and the RPG-7 and RPG 76 KOMAR anti-tank weapons.

But these weapons are merely second-line equipment. The GROM operator's standard weapon used in operations and during reconnaissance missions behind enemy lines is the US-made 5.56mm M4A1 carbine.

With their MP5s at the ready, members of a counter-terrorist team from the maritime squadron are poised to enter a building. Used as main weapons, 9mm MP5s can be seen in two versions: the MP5SD6 and the MP5A3.



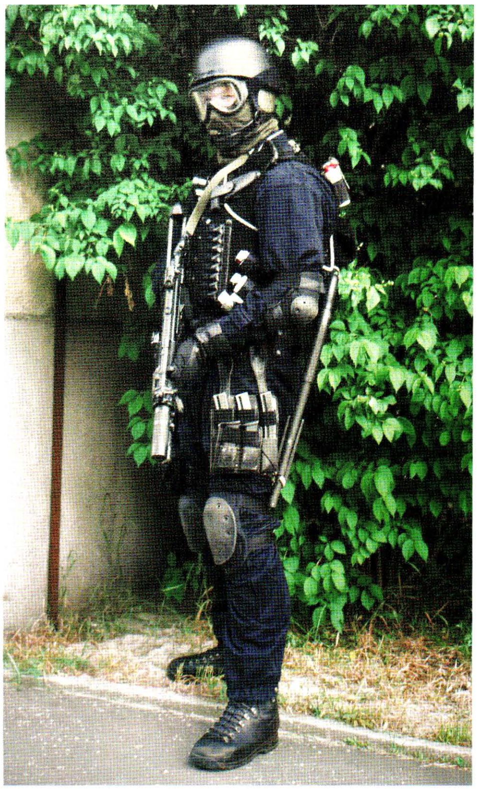
A GROM operator poses for the camera while aiming his 9mm USP Heckler & Koch pistol. The USP in its 9mm version has a weight of 720 grams (1.44 lb) and is 194 mm (7.6 inches) long. Its magazine can contain 15 rounds. The weapon uses an improved recoil-operated Browning locking and recoil-reducing buffering system. The weapon can be fired in single or double action, and a control lever makes it possible to carry the weapon "cocked and locked". Heckler & Koch also manufactures the weapon in .40 S&W, as well as in .45 Auto.

Usually the operators' weapons are fitted with a variety of aiming devices and accessories, including the M68 Aimpoint reflex sight, the AN/PAQ 4A laser pointer, a vertical foregrip, and the Sure Fire 6-volt tactical light.

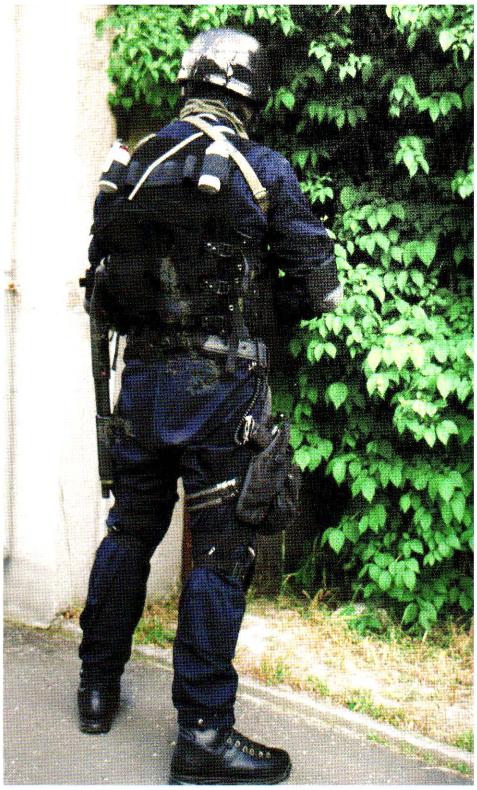
Even though the M4A1 has widely replaced the 9mm MP5 family of submachine guns during operations, Heckler & Koch weapons are still used for GROM's "black tactics" counter-terrorist operations. GROM's inventory features the whole range of MP5s, including the MP5A3 fitted

GROM operators can choose whether they want to use the 9mm Glock 17 pistol or the 9mm USP Heckler & Koch pistol. The weapon of choice of the GROM operator at left is the Heckler & Koch USP. The 9x19mm USP (Universal Self-loading Pistol) has a weight of 753 grams (1.5 lb), a muzzle velocity of 285m/s (935 f/s) and a magazine capacity of 15 rounds. GROM's USPs are fitted with tritium sights that allow easier aiming in dark or smoke-filled rooms.

Here GROM operators can be seen at a range at one of the unit's bases. Live firing is part of the daily routine for GROM operators since they cannot afford to miss their target during a tactical operation. During a training year, each operator fires several thousand rounds of 9mm and 5.56mm ammunition on the ranges. In addition, most tactical training is done using live ammunition. This includes live firing in the "killing house", a training building where the targets are dummies and the hostages are comrades of the operators.



An operator from GROM's maritime squadron displays the uniform worn by the unit when performing "black tactics" against terrorists in urban areas. He is armed with a 9mm USP, an MP5SD6 and a 12-gauge Remington 870 pump shotgun. Basic dress is a black NOMEX flame resistant suit, combat boots and ballistic protection comprising a helmet and vest. To protect his knees and elbows, special protection kit is worn.



The webbing worn by the maritime squadron operator consists of a leather belt that supports an upper-leg pistol holster on the right leg for the USP and an upper-leg magazine carrier on the left leg, which contains magazines for both the USP and the MP5SD6. A black combat vest is worn above the operator's body armor. It contains a knife, shot gun rounds, stun grenades, radio equipment, and so on.

with a sliding stock, the short version of the weapon known as the MP5K, and the silenced version, the MP5SD6. Like their M4s, GROM's MP5 weapons range is fitted with a variety of aiming devices and also features the Sure Fire 6-volt tactical light. The MP5K is also available in the suitcase version frequently used during VIP protection missions.

In addition to his standard weapon, each GROM operator carries a sidearm during operations. This can either be a 9mm Glock 17 pistol or a 9mm USP Heckler & Koch pistol. The type chosen by each operator depends on his own personal preference. As both pistols behave quite differently during live firing, they cannot be exchanged when a weapon is maintained. To prevent a shortage of either type of weapon, each GROM operator has two pistols in the unit's arsenal that have been zeroed-in for his eyes and assigned only to him.

Considered to be the pride of the fleet of GROM's maritime squadron, the 9-meter rigs are fitted with a twin-engine pack that can develop 225hp and propel the craft to a top speed of 50 knots. Radios and GPS are fitted to these rigs, and, as can be seen in the photo, a 7.62mm PK machine gun is mounted at the bow of the boat. The rigs were specially built to GROM specifications and the unique environmental requirements of the Baltic Sea. This picture was taken during a boarding-training session somewhere on the Baltic Sea.

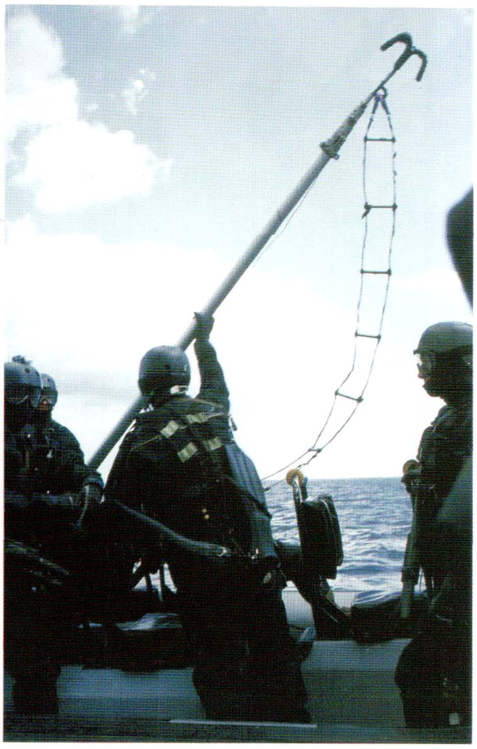
Other handguns used by GROM are the 9mm CZ 85 automatic pistol, the 9mm Browning High Power, and the Smith and Wesson .38-caliber revolver. At least for the Heckler & Koch USP, GROM can also field a silencer. Other submachine guns used by the GROM operators are the ONYX 5.45mm Model 89 and 5.56mm Model 91, which are both basically Polish modifications of the Kalashnikov AKS-74U. For close-quarter use and for opening doors and the new types of windows, GROM uses 12-gauge Remington 870 shotguns. The range of sniper weapons is also plentiful. It includes the 7.62mm SP66 sniper rifle made by Mauser in Germany and the 7.62mm McMillan sniper rifles made in the United States. For harder targets such as armored cars or windows with bullet-proof glass, GROM snipers rely on the recently introduced French-made .50 PGM Hecate II heavy sniper rifle or the .50 McMillan heavy sniper rifle. Another weapon available to GROM operators that provides heavier firepower is the 40mm MZP 1 Multi-Purpose Pistol built by Heckler & Koch. This weapon can fire a large range of ammunition, including HE, smoke, illumination rounds, rubber bullets, and CS Gas rounds. The weapon can be used up to a distance of 500 meters (547 yards). A similar weapon is the US-made 40mm M203 grenade launcher, which is mounted under the M4A1 carbines used by GROM operators. For anti-armor use, as well as to destroy an enemy fortification, blow a larger entry or just illuminate a larger area, GROM uses the Swedish 84mm Carl Gustav recoilless rifle.

Vehicles and Other Equipment

The uniforms worn by GROM are the standard Polish camouflage-pattern outfits, which are used for field operations, as well as for counter-terrorist operations in rural areas. For "black tactics", GROM operators are equipped with black NOMEX flame-resistant coveralls. Different helmets

The 9-meter rigs, like the one seen here that is fully armed and manned, were specially designed for use by GROM's maritime squadron on the Baltic Sea. With their powerful engines and quick speed, the vessels are ideally suited for boarding operations. Note the 7.62mm PK machine gun mounted on the prow of the rig. In this case, the crew consists of the helmsman and an eight-operator boarding party.

Members of GROM's maritime squadron practice boarding procedures during low-level training. This training is often conducted on ships of the Polish Navy, but sometimes it takes place on possible future objectives, such as on ferries on the Baltic Sea. Using an assault hook and rope ladder, the team climbs aboard the suspect ship. This is the most dangerous part of a boarding operation because at this point the team is most vulnerable to enemy attacks. Therefore, the team members who are still in the boat provide cover for the other GROM operators. The first operators, who have already reached the deck, have also taken up firing positions and are ready to repulse a possible attack.



GROM operators prepare the hook assembly aboard a 9-meter rig in order to conduct a boarding operation. Note the rope ladder attached to the hook, which will later allow the team members to climb onto the suspicious ship.

are used, including the ballistic "Fritz" type. A variety of web gear, combat vests and rucksacks are issued to meet GROM operators' needs for carrying combat equipment, grenades, tools, and other equipment. Among these are upper-leg pistol holsters. Body armor is also available, anything from light protective vests that can be worn under civilian clothing to heavy vests with low protection panels and heavy removable ballistic plates. In addition, large ballistic shields for storming buildings are kept in GROM's equipment stores.

For static-line parachuting, GROM uses the standard Polish Army parachute, the D5/AD-95, which is a Polish-made version of a Russian-designed rig. In combination with the AD-95, the AZ-95 reserve parachute is used. First-level free-fall training is taught using the L2 parachute, a round canopy that can be steered. GROM uses the Vector 3 SF, the Falcon, and the RAMAIR square parachute, as well as the System Multi-Mission, for free-fall parachute jump operations and tandem jumping. For HAHO and HALO jumps, GROM uses the PHAROS (Parachute High Altitude Oxygen System) and the OXCON system that is made by Para Flight in the USA. Special thermal jump suits are also available for parachuting from altitudes of 8,200 meters (26,900 feet) and higher. For further security, the Airtec Cypros emergency system is used.

For maritime operations, GROM can field closed-circuit oxygen diving systems, as well as the normal diving systems using flasks, underwater homing systems, underwater navigation systems, waterproof equipment bags, etc. Since the standard underwater operation lasts at least four hours, GROM's maritime squadron only uses dry diving suits. A special launcher for shooting a hook that has a climbing rope attached to it is available for boarding operations. For the benefit of victims of diving accidents, which usually occur when divers remain underwater too long, dive too deep, or come up to the surface too fast, GROM's maritime squadron owns a mobile de-pressure chamber called DART (Diver Attendant Recompression Chamber). The system is mounted in a standard Euro container, which can be transported by trucks, carried slung under a helicopter, or transported aboard ships.

The maritime squadron also has its own small fleet of vessels. The range spans from the two-man kayaks fitted over rubber dinghies to fast speedboats. The pride of the fleet is their 9-meter rigs that are fitted with a twin-engine pack that develops 225hp and is able to reach a top speed of 50 knots. Radios and GPS are fitted to these rigs, and a 7.62mm PK machine gun is mounted at the bow of the boat. The rigs were specially built to GROM specifications and the environmental requirements of the Baltic Sea, whose wave measurements are different from that of other oceans. GROM requested that the author keeps any information on its vehicle pool secret. Therefore, we can only state that most of the transports used are of civilian style and in plain colors. Some of these vehicles are specially prepared for snipers, allowing a sniper team to stay in the vehicle undetected by terrorists until the moment it opens fire. As for tactical vehicles, GROM uses some Mercedes G and Land Rover cross-country vehicles.

Plans for the Future

Since the breakup of the Warsaw Pact, Poland has quickly lifted itself from being a poor, communist-ruled, Soviet Union-orientated state to a democratically ruled, economically developing, young western nation. However, during the transformation process, a criminal society also developed, which today in some ways poses a threat to the young democracy. As in other nations, the criminals have a foothold in all levels of Polish society, from the poor to the rich, and from industrial worker to high-ranking politician. Even though GROM officially has never announced it, it is involved in the battle against this criminal element. It is most certain that the unit is doing its share of work, which will keep GROM busy for years to come.

Additionally, with the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the USA, the violence of international terrorism has reached a new dimension. Led by the USA, the world has reacted to the challenge and formed an alliance to fight international terrorism. Among other ways, this includes the use of armed forces, led of course by special forces. Just before this article left the author's desk, GROM was preparing

These members of GROM's maritime squadron have just boarded a ship and are preparing to enter the interior to search for suspected terrorists. During land operations, GROM operators generally employ the 5.56mm M4A1 carbine, but for maritime operations they mainly use the very reliable MP5SD6, which features a delayed-roller lock. The MP5SD6 is fitted with a trigger group that allows the user to select a three-round burst, in addition to single-shot or rapid automatic fire.

Close-up of a GROM operator from the maritime squadron armed with the suppressed MP5SD6 submachine gun. Manufactured by Heckler & Koch, the MP5 submachine gun family is one of the most popular among international special forces. The 9x19mm-caliber weapon, which uses a roller-locked delayed blowback system, has a theoretical rate of fire of 800 rounds a minute.

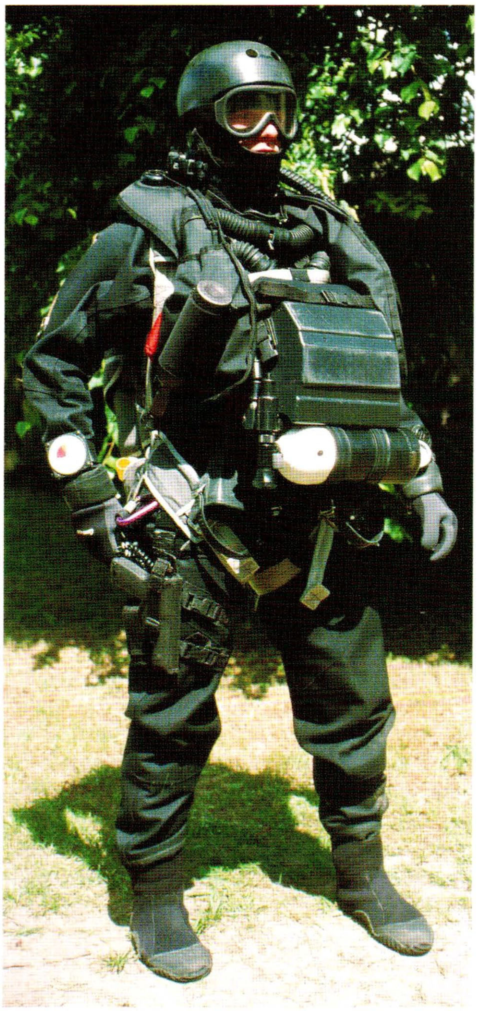
to play a part in the NATO peace-support operation in Afghanistan. Since Poland is a member of NATO, and NATO has announced an Article 5 scenario, it is only a matter of time before the Polish government supports NATO's counter-terrorist operations in one way or another. If this contribution consists of providing troops, it is certain that GROM operators will be part of the Polish contingent. Then once again GROM will work alongside the US SFOD-D and the British 22nd Special Air Service Regiment, who already know they can rely on their Polish comrades.

Acknowledgements

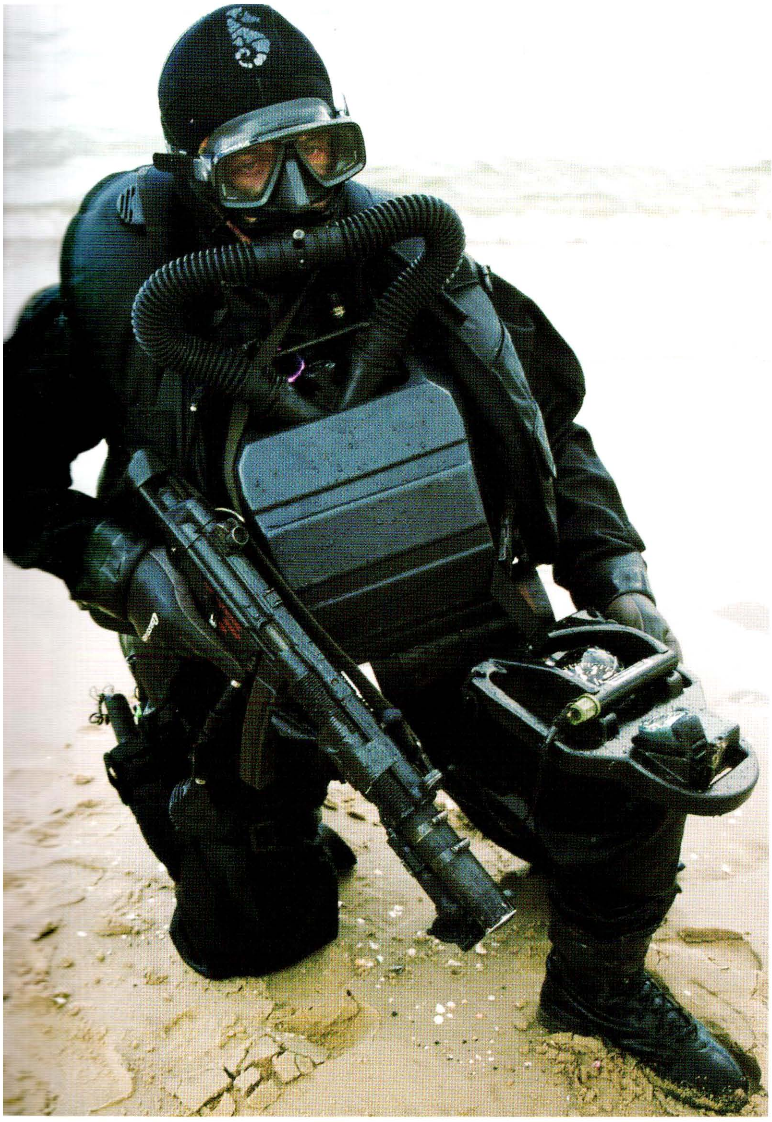
The author would like to thank GROM, its commander, Col. Polko, and all his men for supporting him during his visit to the unit's various training sites, and for aiding with the research for this article. Special thanks go to Krzysztof who looked after me during my stay in Poland.

Members of GROM's maritime squadron search an arrested suspect during boarding training. Both GROM operators are armed with the MP5SD6 and the Glock pistol. Searching a suspect is normally done just as portrayed here. The standard procedure is for one operator to search the suspect while his comrade provides cover in case the suspect tries to escape.

Here the GROM operators demonstrate how a suspect is restrained and given no chance to resist.



Dressed in a dry diving suit, this GROM operator from the maritime squadron is equipped with a closed-circuit oxygen diving system and a free-fall parachute. A common practice of today's special forces, which is also used by GROM, is to drop teams and their kit by parachute some miles off the coast of the country in which the target is situated. Once they have landed in the water, the special forces elements swim or dive to the shore and then infiltrate the country to accomplish their mission.



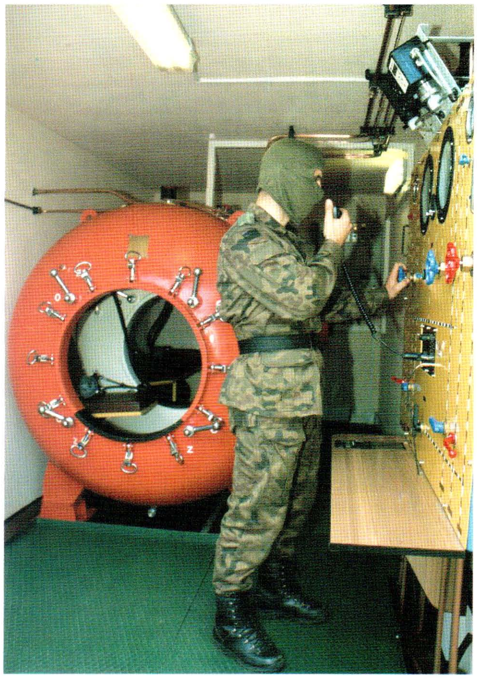
This GROM operator is wearing a dry diving suit and a closed-circuit breathing apparatus, and he is armed with a 9mm MP5SD6. He is demonstrating the underwater orientation device, which consists of a compass, a watch, and a camouflaged low-light source so it can be seen in the dark or in muddy harbor water. Using the orientation kit, GROM's operators are able to find their targets without coming to the surface.

Armed with a 9mm MP5SD6, a GROM operator from the unit's maritime squadron lies in the surf while his comrades move forward out of the open beach area into the cover of the dunes. The waterproof kit bag, which can be seen in front of the soldier, contains all the kit he will need to fulfill his operational tasks during the upcoming mission.

GROM combat divers of the unit's maritime squadron suddenly appear out of the Baltic Sea with their 9mm MP5SD6s ready to fire. Using the closed-circuit breathing apparatus, the operators had been hidden close to shore while waiting for the right moment to emerge from the sea. Note that the MP5SD6s are fitted with the Sure Fire 6-volt tactical light. The use of dry suits allows the GROM divers to stay submerged for several hours without suffering from hypothermia.

Wearing dry diving suits, members of GROM's maritime squadron go ashore after having navigated a distance of several miles in the Baltic Sea. They use closed-circuit oxygen diving systems and carry their equipment in waterproof bags. The weapons they carry are suppressed MP5SD6s, all of which are fitted with the Sure Fire 6-volt tactical light.

Using a rubber dinghy that is nearly invisible to radar, a group of GROM operators from the maritime squadron approach a shoreline. They reduce the speed of the craft to minimize noise. Here the team members can be seen scanning the coastline for enemy presence. This photo was taken during a daylight basic training lesson, but in reality such an infiltration would usually be made at night, without the use of any lights, and the operators would rely heavily on night vision equipment.

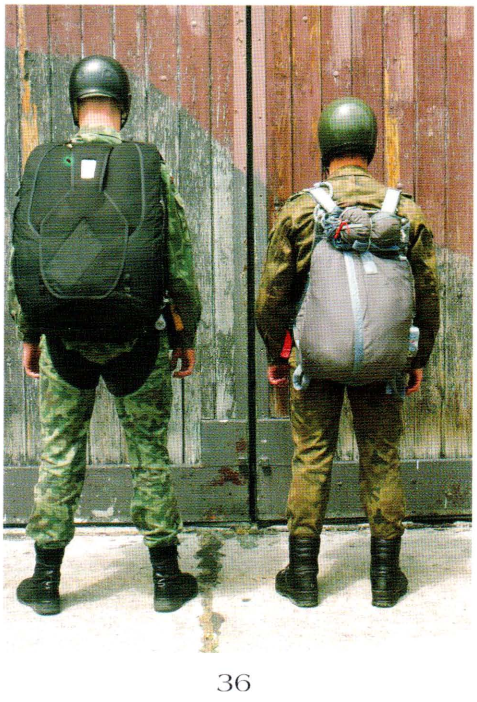


Diving operations usually take four or more hours. To assist victims of diving accidents that may occur if a diver stays in the water too long, dives too deep, or comes up to the surface too fast, GROM's maritime squadron owns a mobile de-pressure chamber. Called DART (Diver Attendant Recompression Chamber), the chamber is fitted with a docking element so it can be connected to a mobile transport unit in order to transport a victim to or from the chamber. The system is mounted in a standard Euro container that can be transported by truck, helicopter or ship. In the event of diving accidents, GROM works closely with the Polish Hyperbaric Institute, which has an international reputation for treatment of such cases.

GROM has its own small fleet of vessels under the command of the maritime squadron. The range spans from a two-man kayak to rubber dinghy to speedboat.

After their rubber dinghy hits the beach, a team of GROM operators storms ashore. They are armed with the 5.56mm M4A1 carbine and the 7.62mm PK machine gun. In addition to counter-terrorist operations, long range reconnaissance missions are also on GROM's task list. Infiltration by boat from the sea is only one way to insert GROM teams. Others might be parachuting, heliborne insertion, or the use of vehicles.

A GROM machine gunner covers his team members using a 7.62mm PK machine gun. Firing the 7.62x54R cartridge, the belt-fed gas-operated weapon has a muzzle velocity of 825m/s (2707 f/s) and a theoretical rate of fire of 690 to 720 rounds per minute. Used in field operations, the 9-kg (20-lb) heavy machine gun is ideal for providing heavy firepower in case a GROM team has to withdraw, or during an attack to suppress an enemy.

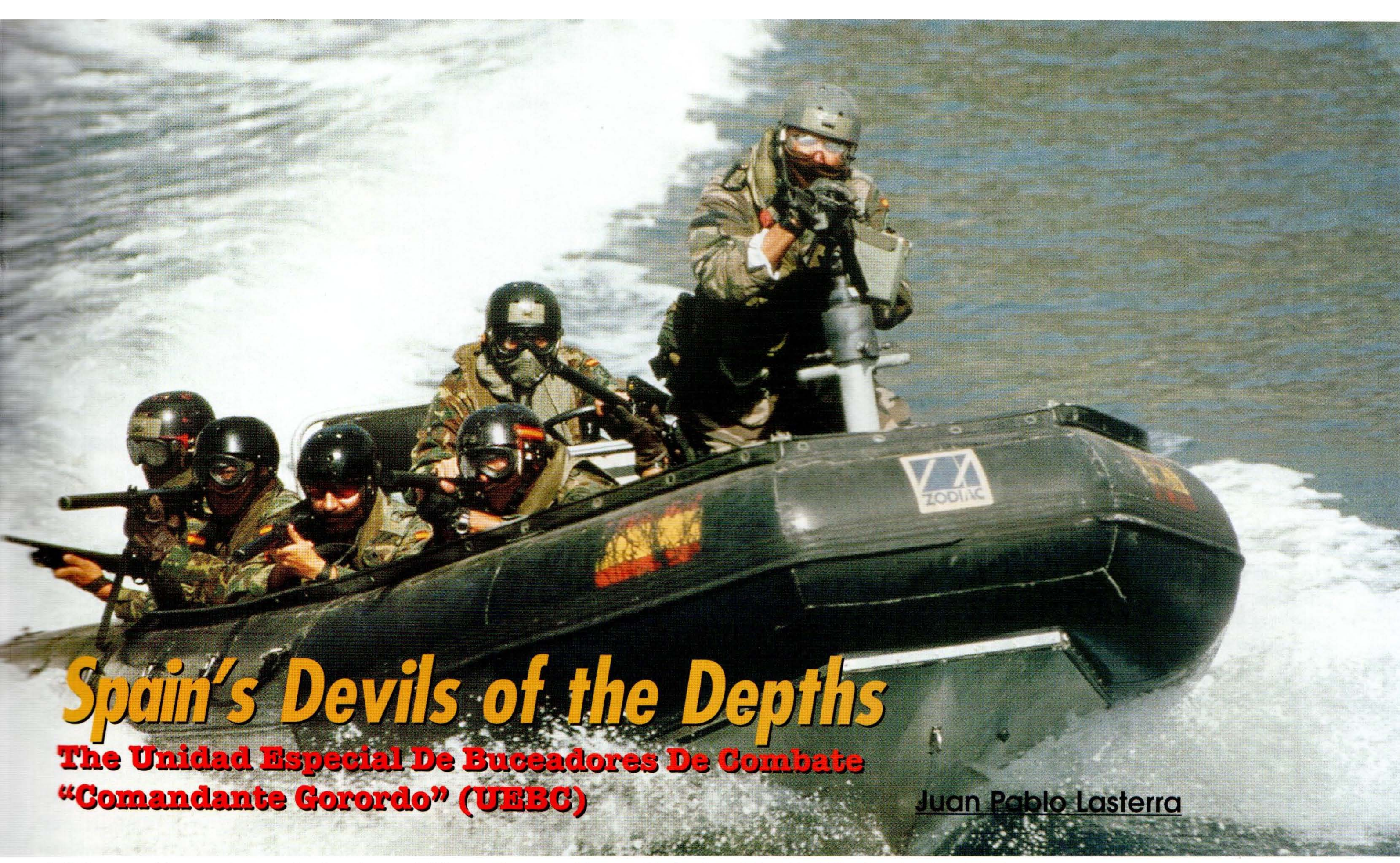


For static-line parachuting, GROM uses the standard Polish Army parachute, the D5/AD-95, which is a Polish-made version of a Russian parachute. An example of this parachute can be seen on the soldier on the right. The GROM operator on the left, who is equipped for free-fall parachuting, wears the Vector 3 SF parachute and a kit container in which a Bergen rucksack is stored.

Spain's Devils of the Depths

The Unidad Especial De Buceadores De Combate "Comandante Gorordo" (UEBC)

Juan Pablo Lasterra



UEBC assault team demonstrating their abilities with one of the unit's Zodiac Mk.5 HD RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat).

In every military, there is always the "elite." That unit, that formation, that armada or squadron of man and machine, whose skills, courage and importance are a cut above and beyond the mainstream warrior. In the Spanish Navy, one such "elite" force of warriors has developed into a spearhead—the first unit into harm's way—and has become a multi-tasked group of specialists trained and equipped to perform a wide range of missions. That unit is the UEBC, or *Unidad Especial De Buceadores De Combate "Comandante Gorordo,"* the elite combat divers of the Spanish Navy.

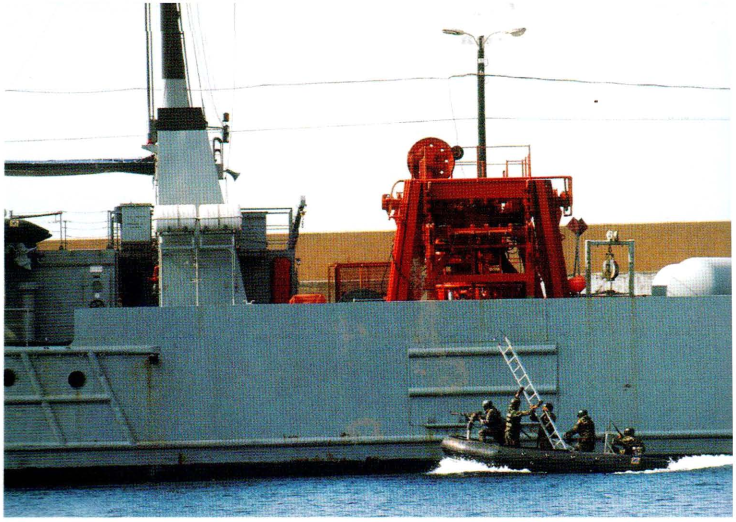
There is a long and revered tradition of naval special warfare in the Spanish Navy. Incredibly, the first written evidence of combat divers in Spain dates from 125 BC. The Roman historian Polibius writes of the part played by divers in the taking of Cartagonova (the modern-day Cartagena) by Scipio. Twenty-two centuries later, on the July 24, 1924, King Alfonso XIII founded the *Escuela de Buceo* (Diving School), at the facilities of the older Divers' School founded by King Carlos III in 1787. In these early years, work centered more on immersion equipment than combat tactics and during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) the missions assigned to military divers were primarily aimed at the salvage and recovery of sunken craft. The success of Italian and British combat divers during the Second World War was not lost to the navies of the world, including the Spanish Navy. The *Seccion de Zapadores Anfibios* (Amphibian Sapper Section) was created in Palma de Mallorca in 1953. This section was trained as a maritime assault force, tasked with destroying enemy vessels with underwater charges.

In 1959, the *Centro de Instrucciection) was* (Diving Instruction

An UEBC assault team is seen prior to a ship-boarding exercise at the La Algameca naval base. Note the M60 7.62mm light machine gun mounted on the Zodiac Mk.5 HD RIB.

UEBC operators, armed with indigenous Star Z-84 silenced SMGs and pump-action Remington 870 shotguns, hone their ship-boarding skills.

An assault team deploys during a ship-boarding exercise at the La Algameca naval facility.



UEBC operators position an assault ladder on an old cargo boat from the Armada Española *during ship-boarding exercises.*

Center) was established in Cartagena and in 1967 the *Unidad Experimental de Buceadores de Combate* (Experimental Combat Diver Unit), successor to the Amphibian Sapper Section, was created. Three years later the unit expanded and became the *Unidad Especial de Buceadores "Comandante Gorordo"* (named after Marine Infantry Major Antonio Gorordo Alvarez.). The unit started out with forty-men trained in closed circuit apparatus diving, underwater combat techniques, infiltration from the sea (from submarines or surface craft) and parachuting (carrying out jumps from SH-3D Sea King and AB-212 helicopters).

The UEBC's home base became the sprawling Mediterranean Naval Base of La Algameca, near the city of Cartagena and became operational in 1970. The UEBC was a special operations test case for a military that had, for political reasons, always been wary of elite formations that threatened to challenge the reigns of power. The unit answers to the Admiral-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Sea Zone and is prepared for action twenty-four-hours-a-day requiring very little time to prepare the material needed for any kind of mission. It is estimated that an "Operational Team" can be ready for deployment at the scene of action in less than six hours.

COMBAT DIVER TRAINING

The UEBC consists of sixty operators, commanded by a mayor, one staff officer, and two operational sections, each consisting of two twelve-man "Operational Teams" ("Alfa," "Bravo," "Charlie" and "Delta"), and a support section dealing with logistical support, administrative tasks and the maintenance and repair of the unit's equipment. The new system of National Military Service has allowed the unit to be staffed by professional soldiers who have excelled in other branches of the Spanish military and who have worked hard just for the chance to earn a spot in the UEBC.

UEBC operators in exercise. They are equipped with the versatile Star Z-84 SMG. This 9mm Parabellum weapon is considered irreplaceable by the Spanish Armada commandos, The Heckler & Koch MP5 is also in use for "dry" operations. Note that the operators are equipped with Pro-Tec helmets, protective goggles and BDU uniforms. The UEBC is a small but effective and well trained unit.

The UEBC selection process is gruelling. Each candidate-hopeful must successfully negotiate a series of entry tests that include a medical-psychological test, endurance tests on mountainous terrain, a timed 1000-meter race, press-ups, pull-ups, apnoea tests (one minute holding breath under water), deepwater diving (four-meters), distance diving (eighteen-meters) and a 400-meter breaststroke. For all those who have survived the selection examinations (the attrition rate is close to eighty-percent) are sent on to the Combat Diver Course at the Centro de Buceo de la Armada (Navy Diver Center), also based at the La Algameca facilities. This course lasts fourteen-weeks and teaches basic diving, applied combat swimming and diving in infiltration missions, beach reconnaissance, underwater demolition, the neutralisation and destruction of enemy installations, vessel assault and, in general, any kind of mission which needs to be carried out underwater. Virtually twenty-five percent of the course covers theory and the remaining seventy-five percent of the course is dedicated to practical exercises.

For the small percentage of soldiers-turned-operators who persevere through the difficult course (the attrition rate at this stage of post-selection training is close to seventy-five percent), their careers in the UEBC begin with a static-line and freefall parachuting course at the "Méndez Parada" Military Parachuting School in Alcantarilla. Once the airborne instruction is complete, new UEBC operators are sent to a wide array of instructional schools, including advance courses in scouting, parachute rigging, jumpmaster qualification, shooting instructor, topography, escape and survival, communications, emergency medicine and trauma care, and underwater and land demolitions.

UEBC operators placing an assault ladder during one of their ship-boarding training exercises.

An UEBC commando climbing an assault ladder. This is one of the most dangerous moments for the operator on ship-boarding missions, as he can't make use of his weapons and needs cover from his comrades.

Another UEBC operator climbing the assault ladder. The individual weapons of choice for this kind of mission are the Star Z-84 SMG (some of them fitted with laser aim devices and/or silencers), the 12 gauge, pump-actioned, Remington 870 shotgun, and the indigenous Star 30M pistol.

The greatest emphasis is placed on commanding parachuting skills as these allow for the fast penetration of Reconnaissance and Underwater Demolition Teams (ERDS) behind enemy lines. Jumps are made using both manual and automatic parachutes. All UEBC operators are airborne-qualified and many of their operations will commence with a 1,200 plunge from an Air Force transport into the blackened waters of either the Mediterranean Sea or Atlantic Ocean. Two members of the unit have recently passed the HALO/HAHO course at the "Méndez Parada" Military Parachuting School in Alcantarilla, thereby making the UEBC the only Spanish unit capable of operating from depths of ninety meters to altitudes of 7,625 meters. Three or four other members of the unit are expected to attain similar qualifications this year. Sailors in the unit, many of whom were previously only qualified as Elementary Divers, are given a three-week Combat Diver Auxiliary Course. This new course allows them to use closed circuit diving apparatus when necessary.

UEBC operators are routinely submitted to physical tests on a regular basis in order to ensure that they maintain the rigid minimum standards required of someone in the unit. These tests consist of a ten-kilometer race, press-ups, pull-ups, high jump, swimming with aids, breaststroke and rowing. The tests are not intended as a method by which to pass and drop the members out of the unit, but rather as a means to motivate the divers to maintain the high levels of physical fitness they need.

A VARIETY OF TECHNIQUES FOR A VARIETY OF MISSIONS

The UEBC's primary task involves amphibious operational support (beach reconnaissance and the removal of obstacles) to larger-scale military and naval missions. The unit is tasked with probing enemy defenses and provided real-time intelligence, as well as anti-shipping measures and sabotage missions inside enemy ports and coastal facilities. The expansion of the "Naval Special Warfare" mandate has broadened the UEBC's role in modern Spanish military operations, as well. The UEBC has become one of Spain's primary vessel boarding units, either counter-terrorist mission, to seize contraband cargo (such as in enforcing United Nations embargoes), as well as in recovering personnel or material from enemy vessels. Up until 1981, when the Guardia Civil created the GEAS, or *Grupo Especial de Actividades Subacuaticas* (Special Underwater Actions Group), the UEBC was called upon to handle water-related disasters, such as emergency rescue missions to areas hit by flooding, responding to sinking ships and those lost at sea.

The UEBC has developed numerous tactics by which it carries out its ship-boarding mandate, the majority of which revolve around fast-rope penetration techniques from helicopters. The first of such tactic involves a helicopter hovering some twenty-meters above the waves with the operators descending rapidly down a thick rope with their legs crossed and trying to keep as upright a position as possible; the operators use gloves to brake their descent. When they reach the targeted ship, the operators remove their gloves, leave the vicinity of the rope in order to enable the rest of the commando to arrive and take up position. Helo-casting is another technique used for ship-assault infiltration from helicopters. This tactic consists of the operators jumping into the water from a height of ten-meters with their arms either crossed or raised skyward. Another tactic deployed by the unit for ship-assault insertions is through HALO/HAHO techniques.

Two UEBC commandos during ship takedown training. The operator on the right is armed with a Star Z-84 silenced SMG, fitted with a Lasersight LS45 laser aiming device.

An UEBC operator inspecting the deck of a boarded vessel during training exercises.

Two UEBC commandos covering the deck of a boarded vessel. Hostile response can appear suddenly. A ship has multiple compartments and the UEBC operators have to perform full inspections to avoid unpleasant surprises. SMGs are the chosen weapons due to their reduced size.

When the UEBC has to board a vessel, it does so using either helicopters or launches, or both, depending on the type of threat posed or the factor of surprise required. If only launches are to be utilized, then the craft approach the bow of the vessel using the noise from the vessel's engines to cover the noise of the assault launch's own outboard motor. One of the launches will then comes up alongside the vessel while the other covers the deck with its M60 7.62mm light machine gun and the divers' own small arms in case of a hostile enemy response. The launch responsible for boarding the first wave of operators maneuvers into position to facilitate the primary access ladder. This stage requires a great deal of skill as the boat being boarded may try to break away from the launch, which then runs the risk of sinking.

Night vision goggles (NVG) are carried during nighttime operations. This UEBC operator is using AN/PVS-7C NVGs for photographic purposes only!

The AN/PVS-7C NVGs are one of the most advanced items of his class, so the UEBC´s commandos are equipped with them.

The pump-action Remington 870 shotgun gives the necessary support to an UEBC assault team.

Once the ladder has been put into position, the first diver climbs aboard and quickly fastens it safely. Then the rest of the assault team board the vessel and secure the deck. No longer necessary the cover provided by the second launch, its crewmembers board the vessel and split up into several tactical assault groups. One of these groups inspects the cabins and crew's quarters, while the rest take control of the bridge, the engine room and the deck. Ship-boarding exercises are sometimes performed using two SH-3D Sea King or AB-212 helicopters instead of launches or with one helicopter and one launch. It should be pointed out that, as sailors, the UEBC operators are qualified to take command of all types of vessels that could be encountered in the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean.

INFILTRATION FROM HIGH-SPEED CRAFT

High-speed inflatables are the primary means of insertion for UEBC operations. The method that was first developed and then perfected during the Second World War, is still a unit mainstay. Deploying from a mother ship, or a safe haven inside a slice of friendly (or seized enemy) territory, operators launch from high-speed speedboats or inflatables. The craft deploy in mid-water, a safe distance from the targeted beachhead, and is used to pick up the combat divers following the operation. The divers line up in single file at twenty-five-meter intervals and when the launch approaches, the divers stretch out an arm so that they can be scooped up by an operator clutching a rope with a large rubber loop at the end. The diver inserts his arm in the loop and is then quickly hoisted on board. A second crewmember helps the diver board the launch while the next diver is approached.

The Star Z-84 SMG is widely used by the Spanish UEBC commandos and, in small quantity, by other national military and security units. This UEBC operator is pointing his silenced Star Z-84 SMG during ship takedown training.

UEBC commandos are qualified to take command of all kind of vessels. If the crew of a boarded vessel refuses to collaborate, UEBC operators will take control of the ship's bridge.

A second UEBC penetration and recovery technique involves sending a high-speed Zodiac, which stops for a few seconds at a certain point for the divers to jump into the water and then leaves the vicinity. When the mission has been completed, the Zodiac comes back to collect the divers using the same short stop technique used to deploy them.

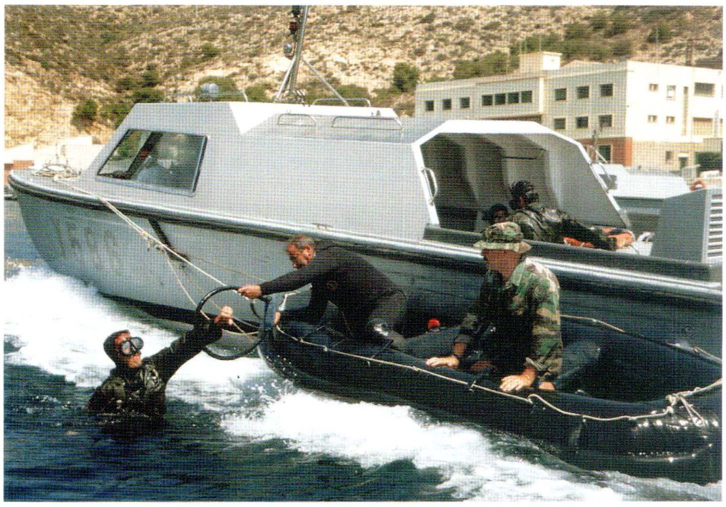
Another infiltration technique involves the use of submarines. Spanish Navy S-60 and S-70s are normally used, although joint maneuvers have been carried out with SSN nuclear submarines from the North American fleet. To make their location more difficult, the submarines do not cross the horizon and cannot, therefore, be spotted from the beach. The divers inflate with their dinghies and reach dry land, which may be anything up to thirty kilometers away, using "Over the Horizon" navigation. On other occasions the submarines get closer to the coast and the divers leave through the torpedo tubes using closed circuit apparatus in order not to generate bubbles which may compromise their presence.

Because of economic considerations, the UEBC does not possess SVD mini-submarines at its disposal, though UEBC operators, when training with the U.S. Navy SEALs, have learned how to carry out infiltration ops with these craft.

A UNIT IN PERMANENT EVOLUTION

The UEBC has participated in exercises with every special operations unit in the Spanish Armed Forces, as well as special operations entities in the Guardia Civil (the UEI Special Intervention Unit) and the National Police's GEO counter-terrorist force, and the Customs Service specialised counter-narcotics forces. The UEBC also maintains cross-training contacts with various U.S. Navy SEAL teams; the French Marine "*Commando Hubert*"; the Royal Moroccan *"Plongueurs de Combat";* Britain's SBS; Italy's "COMSUBIN" and the San Marco Battalion; Turkish UDT; the Portuguese DAE; the "*Minentaucherkompanie*" from Germany Navy; and, the Chilean Navy's Marine Infantry Commando Group No. 51. Interactivity with domestic and foreign special operations units has provided the UEBC with a wealth of never-ending knowledge and contacts that have expanded the unit's abilities and philosophies.

Two UEBC is operators ready to retrieve a comrade during an exfiltration exercise, using a well known method, dating from the Second World War, but still in use in many of the world's combat swimmers units.



During exfiltration exercises, an UEBC operator is being recovered from the waters by his comrades. This technique requires a high degree of precision, as the recovering launch passes close to the divers at high speed.

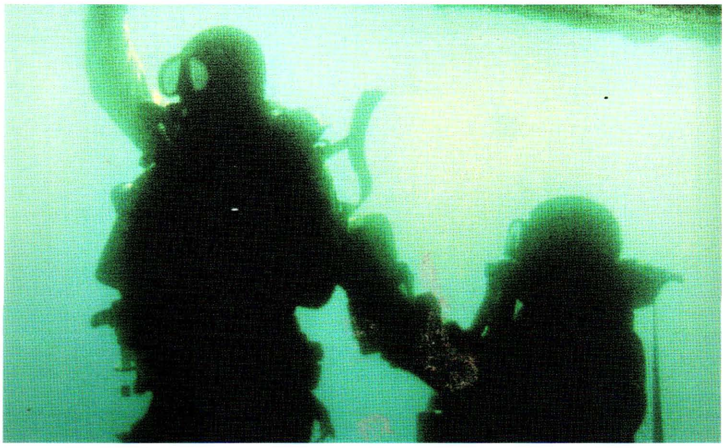
An UEBC combat diver boards the exfiltration launch. Note that he wears a BDU uniform over the neoprene suit.

An UEBC operator emerging out of the waters with his Star Z-84 SMG.

An UEBC commando swims in the waters of La Algameca using an underwater compass board for orientation.

In the early 1990s, following the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the Gulf War and the violent disintegration of the Balkans, the UEBC's importance to Spain—and NATO—increased ten-fold. Peacekeeping operations, embargo-enforcement and rapid deployment needs prompted the Spanish Navy to increase the unit's size and provide it with state-of-the-art material to augment and expand its operational capacity. Those abilities were not lost to NATO planners and the Spanish Ministry of Defense. In 1997, the UEBC was the first Spanish unit to enter the port of Durres during "Operation Sunrise" in Albania, where it reconnoitred the harbor and port facilities needed to disembark the Spanish Foreign Legion. In "Operation Alfa Romeo" in Kosovo (1999), the UEBC carried out Fleet security operations and beach reconnaissance work both for the disembarking of material for the Spanish contingent and the possible use of such beaches for emergency evacuation purposes. The unit was also alerted for possible victim aid action during the recent flooding in Mozambique, although in the end, they were not called upon to act.

Two UEBC operators placing a limpet mine on an "enemy" ship during training exercises. (UEBC)



Two UEBC operators using Dräger LAR VI re-breathers. This closed circuit apparatus does not make bubbles, so the commandos can operate undetected. (UEBC)

WEAPONS

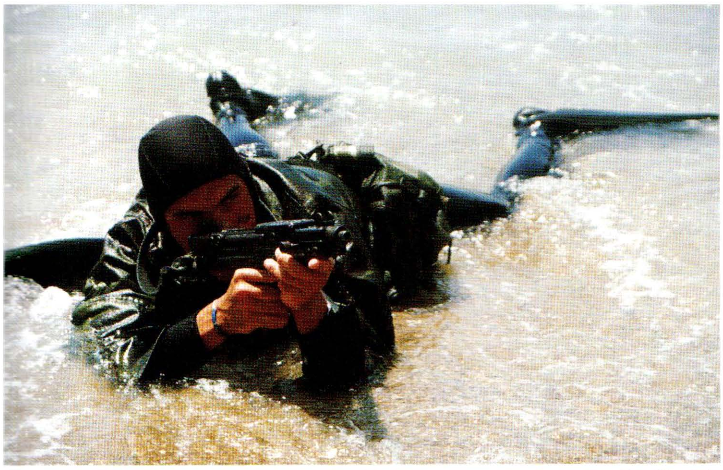
The *Unidad Especial de Buceadores de Combate* (UEBC) is equipped with a wide variety of domestic and foreign weapons. The standard sidearm is the Star 30M 9mm pistol, though operators are allowed to selected a weapon they feel most comfortable with. The Star Z-84 9mm submachine gun is the primary assault weapon, often fitted with a suppressor and a Laser-sight LS45 laser aimpoint device. The ubiquitous Heckler and Koch MP5A5, however, has recently been adopted as the primary weapon in fast rope initiated actions. The Cetme family of 5.56mm assault rifles has also been replaced, and the Heckler and Koch G36E system is now UEBC standard-issue. UEBC snipers are issued with the indigenous C-75 7.62mm sniper rifle, and the Accuracy International 7.62mm AW and the Barrett M95 heavy sniping rifle are used. Other individual weapons are the Remington 870 shotgun and the Barnett Commando crossbow. Squad support weapons are the MG3 and the M60D 7.62mm machineguns, the 60mm Ecia Commando mortar and the Instalaza C90-C rocket launcher.

UEBC operators also carry flash-bang grenades (for entries on ship-boarding missions), indigenous Calderon and R-41 Cordo offensive fragmentation grenades, SAES Mila 6C limpet mines and Claymore mines.

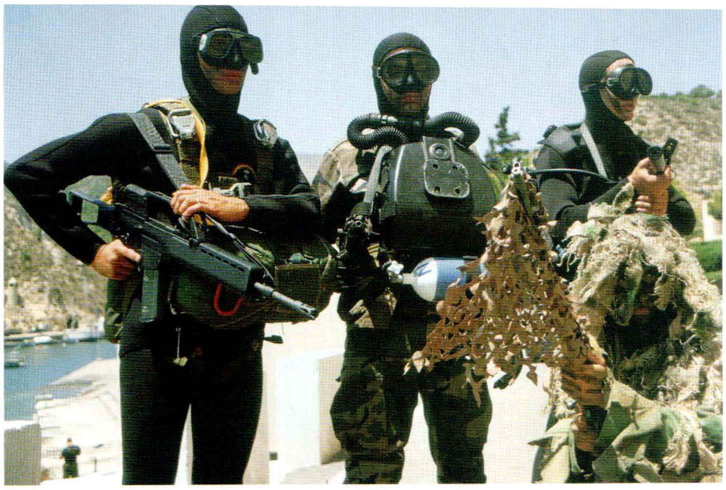
EQUIPMENT

UEBC operators have at their disposal several neoprene suits, some of them made of titanium fibers. A vital piece of the combat swimmer gear is the breathing rig. The Beuchat open circuit system is issued for SCUBA diving missions. The antimagnetic Fenzy DC-55 system is used for the counter-mine warfare operations. The Fenzy PO-68 rebreather has been recently replaced by the Dräger LAR-VI system for clandestine operations.

One of the UEBC's missions is beach reconnaissance. Two operators, armed with indigenous Star Z-84 SMGs, perform training exercises in order to improve their recon skills near the Naval Base of La Algameca. The Spanish Mediterranean Coast provides great natural scenarios for the unit's exercises.



Star Z-84 are sturdy weapons. This simple, light and reliable SMG is used by the UEBC operators in all conditions and terrain without malfunctions. The Star SMG is fed by 25 or 30-round box magazines, and fires from an open bolt.

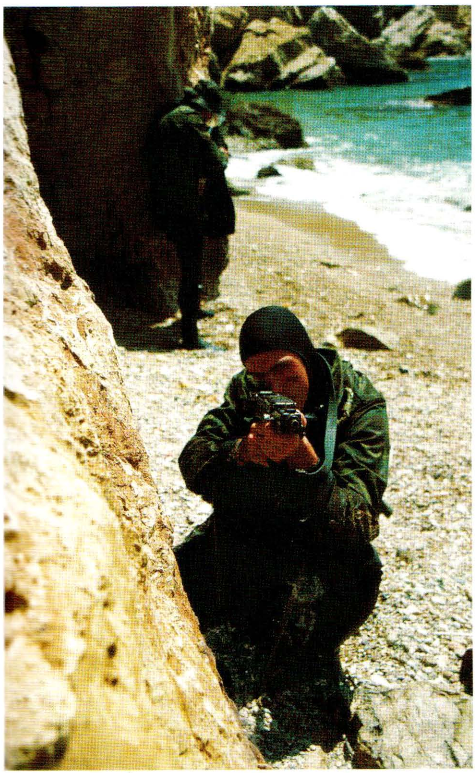


UEBC operators displaying some of their uniforms (sniper, wet jumo, close circuit diver and SCUBA swimmer), weapons and equipment.

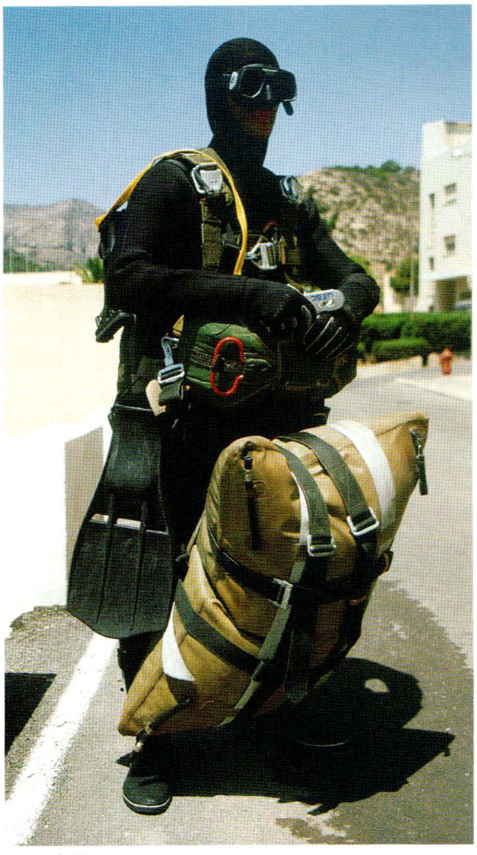
For ship-boarding missions, UEBC operators wear BDU uniforms over their neoprene suits, as well as tactical load bearing vests, Protec helmets, balaclavas or scarves, protective goggles and military or police tactical boots. Snipers are issued with domestically produced Ghillie Suits. The UEBC's parachutes include the automatic MC1-1C and the manual MT-1X. Several Foil precision parachutes are also in use. When needed, the HALO/HAHO equipment is provided by the Air Force.

UEBC radio specialists use Maxon intra-team radio systems, fitted with throat mike and earpiece. For long distance image and information transmission, the Harris RC Communications PRC-138 transceivers, complete with Kontron Elektronic computers, Harris modems and Sony Mavika digital cameras, are used. The French-built Thompsom PR4G RT-9200 transceiver, which includes an integrated digital encryption module, a fast frequencies shifter system and a tactical data terminal, is now in service.

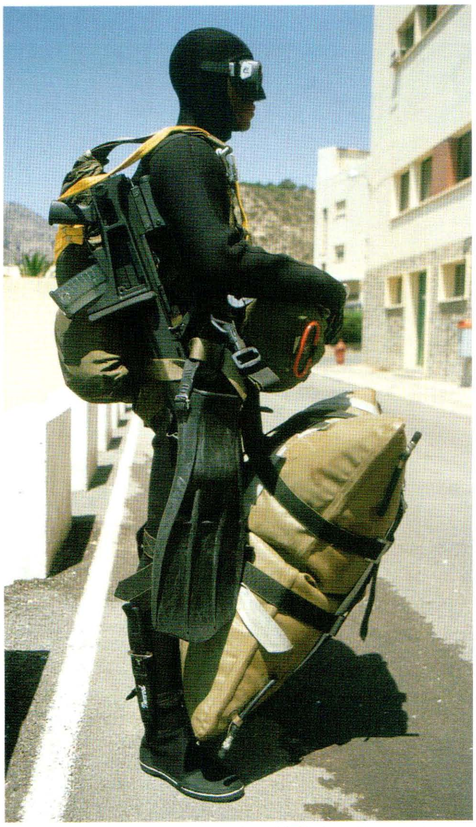
Other tools of the trade include the indigenous Marte Kevlar helmets, Gore-Tex uniforms, gas masks, watertight bags, antimagnetic knives, AN/PVS-5 and AN/PVS-7C night vision goggles, Magellan and underwater GPS receivers, underwater attack boards and collapsible or fixed assault ladders. UEBC operators can deploy from Valiant DR-750 and Zodiac Mk.5 HD rigid inflatable boats (RIB), Zodiac Commando 4.70 rubber boats and several other indigenous and foreign-made Inflatable Boat Systems (IBS). The *Centro de Buceo de la Armada* (CBA) supplies its fleet of Duarry Supercat RIBs and light support craft vessels for unit exercises. Foreign naval special warfare units have trained Spanish combat swimmers in the use of Klepper kayaks and the U.S. Navy SEAL SDVs. Several Nissan Patrol and Land Rover Defender vehicles are in use for land deployments.



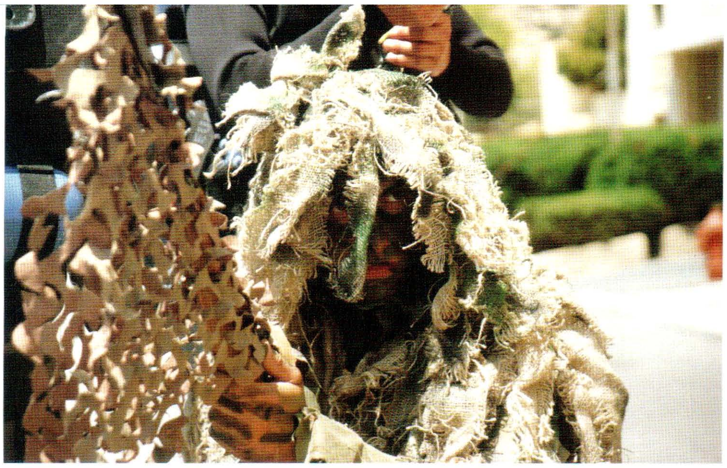
One of the UEBC's missions is the reconnaissance of the unit's potential scenarios of action. Here, two operators train hard under a grueling sun, performing recon exercises. The surroundings of the Naval Base of La Algameca are ideal scenarios for the UEBC's reconnaissance training.



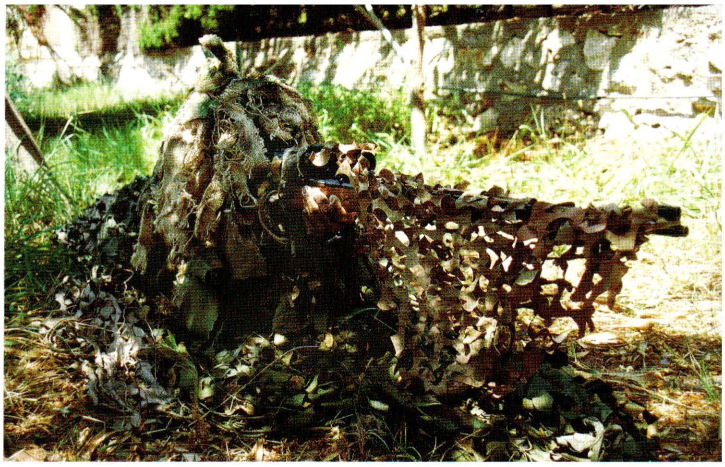
UEBC operator with full wet jump gear: automatic MC-1C parachute, neoprene suit, flippers, watertight bag, a-magnetical knife and 5.56mm Heckler & Koch G36 assault rifle.



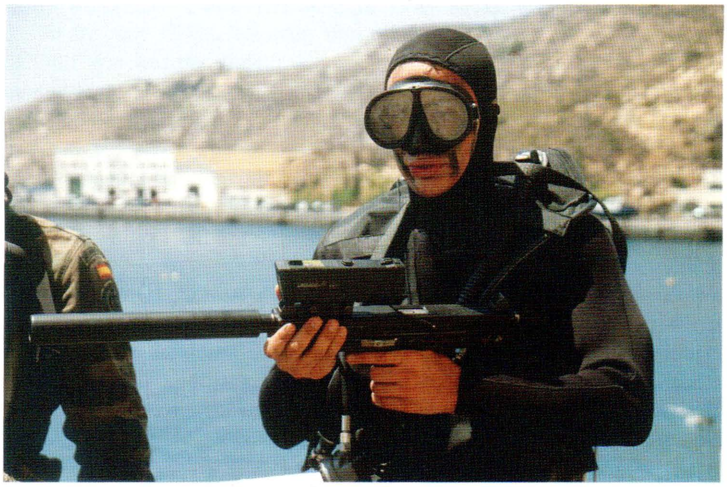
Another view of the UEBC full wet jump gear: automatic MC-1C parachute, neoprene suit, flippers, watertight bag, a-magnetical knife and 5.56mm Heckler & Koch G36 assault rifle.



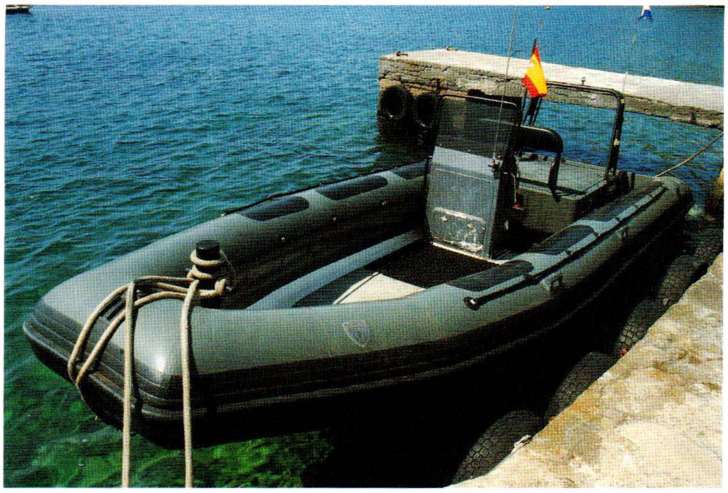
UEBC sniper with "ghillie suit" and indigenous Santa Barbara C-75 7.72mm sniper rifle.



UEBC sniper taking aim with a Santa Barbara C-75 7.62mm sniper rifle. The Accuracy International AW (in the same caliber) and the Barrett M95 (in .50 cal.) are also in the unit's armory.

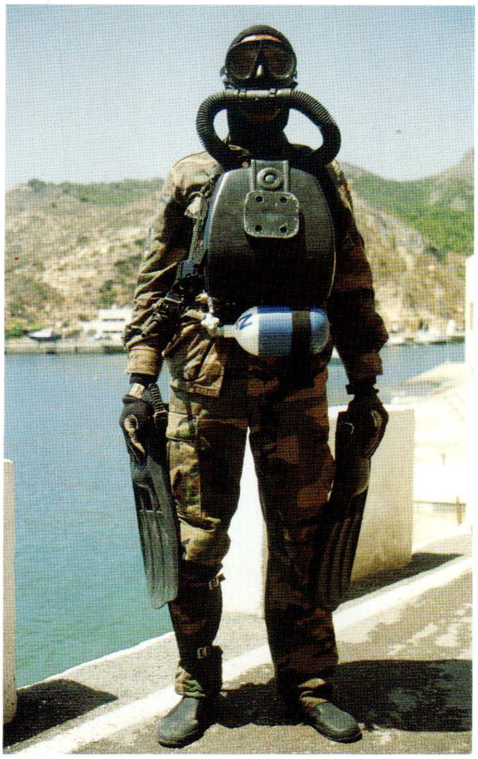


UEBC operator with SCUBA gear. Note that the Star Z-84 SMG is fitted with a silencer and a Lasersight LS45 laser aim device. That implies the use of a watertight bag to carry the weapon underwater.

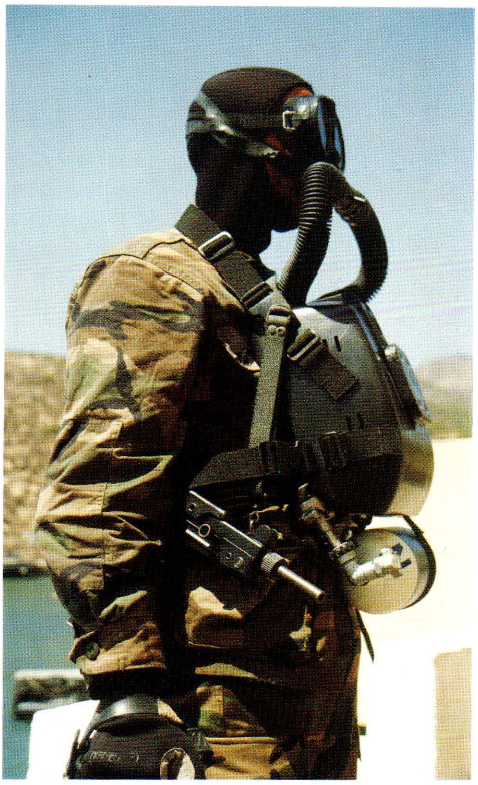


One of the UEBC's Valiant DR-750 RIBs at the Naval Station of La Algameca.

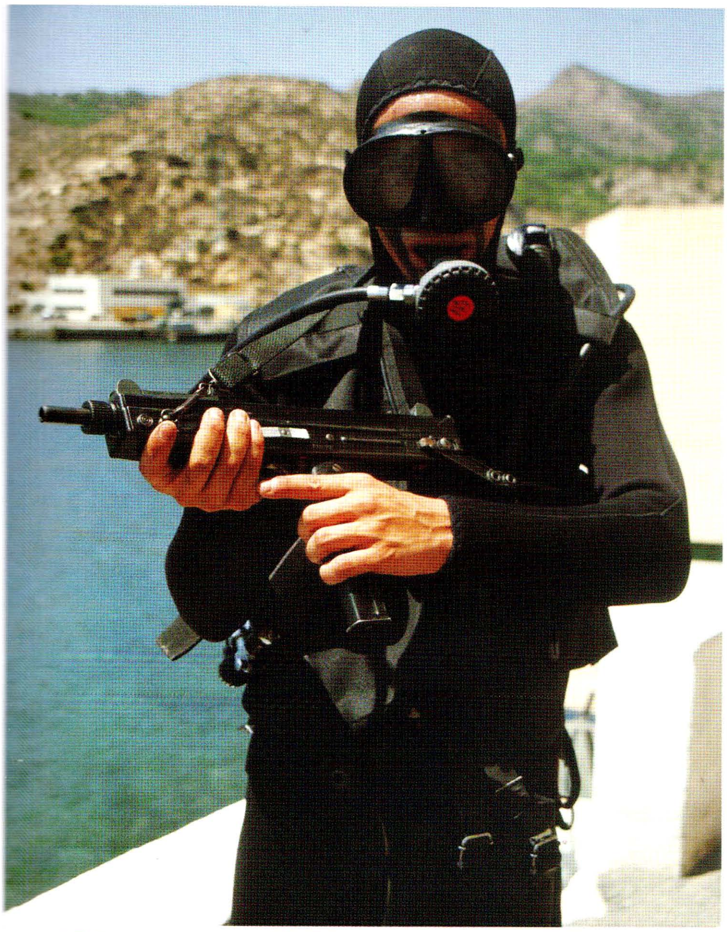
UEBC sniper standing with his Santa Barbara C-75 7.62mm sniper rifle. This weapon uses a Mauser bolt action system and is in current use in other Spanish military and security forces.



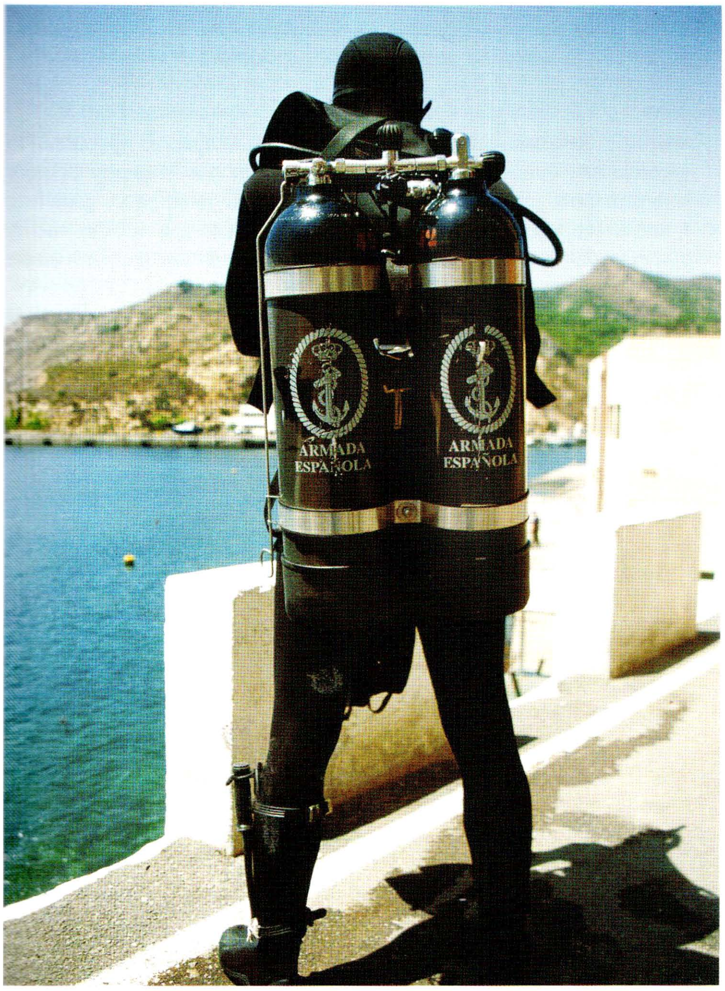
UEBC operator with full sea infiltration gear: BDU dress over neoprene suit, flippers, Dräger LAR VI re-breather and Star Z-84 SMG. The Dräger is one of the most advanced items of his class, and is in use in several special units around the world.



Another view of an UEBC operator with full sea infiltration gear: BDU dress over neoprene suit, flippers, Dräger LAR VI re-breather and Star Z-84 SMG. Note that older Z-84 SMGs have a longer barrel.



UEBC operator with SCUBA gear: neoprene suit, Beuchat open circuit apparatus and Star Z-84 SMG

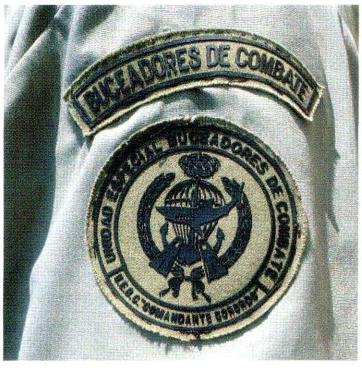

ARMADA ESPAÑOLA
ARMADA ESPAÑOLA

UEBC commando with neoprene suit and Beuchat open circuit apparatus, used in SCUBA operations.

UEBC team during reconnaissance exercises, using a RT-1694/PRC-138 transmitter and a Kontron Electronic computer.

These UEBC recon operators are issued with the latest technology in data and image transmission: the RT-1694/PRC-138 transmitter and the Kontron Electronic computer.

An UEBC recon operator covers his comrade using a Heckler & Koch G36 5.56mm assault rifle. This weapon is the new standard rifle of the Spanish Ejercito de Tierra (army), Armada (navy) y Ejercito del Aire (air force).


BUCEADORES DE COMBATE
UNIDAD ESPECIAL BUCEADORES DE COMBATE
U.E.B.C. "COMANDANTE GORORDO"

Unidad Especial de Buceadores de Combate (UEBC) "Comandante Gorordo" shoulder patch.

Italian Army 9th Parachute Assault Regiment "Col Moschin"

Alberto Scarpitta

The Browning M2 heavy machine gun uses 12.7mm ammunition and is principally used for support duties mounted on the regiment's vehicles and boats.

In 1998, the *Nucleo* FOS (Special Operations Forces Cell), a small cell within the Italian Army General Staff, was created. Its mission was to co-ordinate the different Special Operations Forces (SOF) units, develop their doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures, organize their training and instruction courses, and acquire the peculiar equipment and weapons necessary for special operations. According to the cell's planning, the Army's SOF units included the following:

- One Special Forces Unit, the 9th Parachute Assault Regiment "Col Moschin", which was capable of performing all SF missions.
- One LRRP company to be assigned to Col Moschin Regiment for training and administrative purposes.
- One Ranger unit, the Alpine Paratroopers Battalion "Monte Cervino", which was trained to conduct direct-action operations, raids and light infantry missions.

The 9th *Reggimento d'Assalto Paracadutisti* "Col Moschin"

Based at the Vannucci barracks in Livorno, the 9th Parachute Assault Regiment "Col Moschin" is the only Special Forces unit in the Italian Army. It has long been carrying out a crucial role in the turbulent post-Cold War world, where ethnic hostilities, religious fanaticism, and economic and demographic unbalance are always creating new threats. Its task is to execute strategic and operational requirements for the Italian government and high-level military commands.

The Regiment's SF soldiers, who are called *incursori* (para-raiders), are specially selected, trained and equipped, and are capable of carrying out extended unconventional operations deep within hostile or denied territory, performing the following three main Special Forces missions:

- Direct Actions: Short-duration strikes, raids, ambushes, and sabotage to be carried out against high-value targets. DA missions may also include the recovery of personnel, fire support direction and final guidance of stand-off weapons such as laser-guided smart bombs.
- Special Reconnaissance: Humint (human intelligence) operations to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance activities in enemy territory to provide high-level commands with strategic intelligence gathering and to report data on capabilities, intentions and activities of enemy forces. SR activities may include target acquisition and post-strike damage assessment.
- Military Assistance: A training and operative collaboration with allied and friendly forces (at this moment with Maltese and Jordanian units).

But the Italian Army Special Forces may be called upon to execute ever-changing missions and must perform many collateral and secondary activities such as NEO missions (Non-combatant Evacuation Operations for the evacuation of Italian and Western citizens from countries at risk). Included too would be counter-terrorism and hostage rescue abroad, or even in Italy when the specific situation requires a great number of operators and the capabilities of SWAT-type units within the Police and Carabinieri are insufficient. The *incursori* would also carry out combat SAR missions involving the search and recovery of distressed personnel and pilots shot down behind enemy lines.

Because of their advanced military training, their language skills, their operative experience in very different engagements, and their practice of limiting the use of force to avoid collateral damage, the operators earn key roles in the beginning and hot phase of the peacekeeping operations. This is when circumstances may require the use of small, specialized teams that are capable of making an easy transition from peacetime to conflict situations.

Incursori are highly skilled, extremely capable soldiers, a natural choice to support all Other-Than-War and Crisis-Response Operations in which the Italian Army has been involved, from Lebanon to Somalia, from

A formation of Italian Army SF soldiers during a ceremony on Col Moschin, the hill that gives the name to the Regiment.

Ethiopia to Rwanda and Yemen, from Albania to Bosnia, and from East Timor to Kosovo. In these regions military personnel had to be both warriors and diplomats, conduct humanitarian assistance, and win the confidence of a foreign population in a hostile environment. In all of these difficult situations, the 9th Assault Parachute Regiment has carried out the most delicate and dangerous missions. For these reasons, the Italian Army General Staff has decided to progressively reinforce the Regiment.

The Operative Component

Today the 9th Col Moschin Regiment is comprised of a Headquarters (structured in the usual way with Personnel, Intelligence-Training Operations, Logistics, and Administration sections), Headquarters Company, Signal Company, LRRP Company (under construction), and two battalion-level units. One is operative (the 1st *Incursori* Battalion), and the second, called RAFOS (*Reparto Addestramento Forze per Operazioni Speciali*- Special Operations Forces Training Unit), is dedicated to training tasks.

If the Headquarters Company, which is comprised of the Command Platoon and Transport and Material Platoon, is present in all Italian regiments, other components are absolutely atypical and are to be examined separately. The Signal Company, created for the reinforcement of former signal platoon of HQ Company, contains the specialists who maintain the connection between the patrols and the operative detachments arrayed on land and the advanced logistic bases. It is comprised of a HQ platoon and two communications platoons, to which are assigned both *incursori* (who after many years of dangerous activities might get relatively easier tasks) and signal specialists assigned to the specific task. These men, even without the qualification of "*incursori*", are all parachute qualified.

Hostage rescue training. It takes about two years to complete the incursori training.

The 9th Regiment has participated in all military operations that have involved Italy, from Lebanon to Somalia, and from Bosnia to Kosovo.

Italian SOF soldiers must adapt to different and evolving threats, in joint and combined situations. Selectively recruited and trained, the SF soldier remains the key to success in all missions.

This 9th Regiment soldier is armed with a Beretta SCP-70/90 assault rifle fitted with a Trijicon ACOG 4x32 scope, a self-luminous aiming system designed to improve firing accuracy under low-light conditions.

The Thompson TRC-350 HF secure radio permits Operational Detachments to connect with their HQ over very long distances, with low risks of being intercepted.

A sniper armed with an Accuracy International 7.62mm suppressed sniper rifle. Using special subsonic ammunition, this model is accurate out to 300 meters (328 yards) with a 6x42 sight.

The LRRP company, the widely used acronym that characterizes units tasked with long range reconnaissance and surveillance activities, is presently in its organizational phase as the RAFOS finishes the first qualification course for these operators. Soon the first of two Reconnaissance Platoons will become operative. The squads within these platoons will be composed of six members: a non-commissioned officer, a sergeant, in command and five VSPs (Volunteers on Permanent Service), with the VSPs being the second-in-command, two communications specialists, a medical specialist, and a scout.

The size of each squad in the platoons represents a compromise between opposing requirements. On the one hand, the classic brick of four men would be better for mobility, stealth and concealment. On the other hand, the necessity of allowing a certain turnover among the operators during a long surveillance mission makes a six-man team preferable. Also, the weight of new equipment used for reconnaissance and surveillance plays a factor. Further, with six elements it is possible to assure the observation of two separate targets during the same mission. Obviously, it is still possible to adapt a unit to a specific necessity where a lighter equipped unit might be more effective, e.g., in an urban area.

The *Incursori*

Apart from a small command structure, the First Battalion comprises two Special Forces *incursori* companies, the 110th and the 120th, which are composed of fully SF-qualified personnel in permanent service, and the 111th *Guastatori Paracadutisti* (parachute sapper) company that is made up of suitably trained volunteers on short-term service. The *incursori* companies are composed of a Command Detachment and a certain number of Operational Detachments, the basic unit of the Army Special Forces. These were recently reduced in size from nine to eight men, essentially to

Heavy sniping with a 12.7mm-caliber Barrett M82A1 semi-automatic rifle. This weapon enables the incursori *to engage hard targets, such as airplanes, helicopters and vehicles, at a distance of more than 1,000 meters.*

Col Moschin incursori *continually hone their skills in urban combat tactics, combat marksmanship, advanced shooting, and CQB techniques. SF soldiers effect a breach, enter a building, and secure it.*

create an easier subdivision of two bricks of four members and to simplify their transportation on two light utility vehicles.

Every operational detachment consists of the commander, who is a particularly experienced first lieutenant or a warrant officer, and seven SF soldiers: the second-in-command acting as operations specialist, the information specialist, one medic, two communications specialists, an expert in demolition, and one weapons specialist. The operational detachment is a total of three sergeants and four volunteers on permanent service.

Apart from these individual specialization, which are learned directly at the unit level in addition to the basic knowledge, the operators are cross-trained and taught additional patrol skills to give the detachment greater flexibility. This helps to provide individuals with multiple necessary skills and a capacity for mutual replacement.

Incursori companies do not have a platoon-level structure. However, about half of the detachments are commanded by an officer who, if necessary, could take command of missions that require the work of two detachments. For more complex operations, the company commander would certainly be in charge.

The *Guastatori* Parachutist Company is also organized into Operational Detachments under the command of an *incursori*-qualified warrant officer. The unit's tasks are to support the SF component in their unconventional missions and conduct operations that do not require the superior skills of the *incursori* companies.

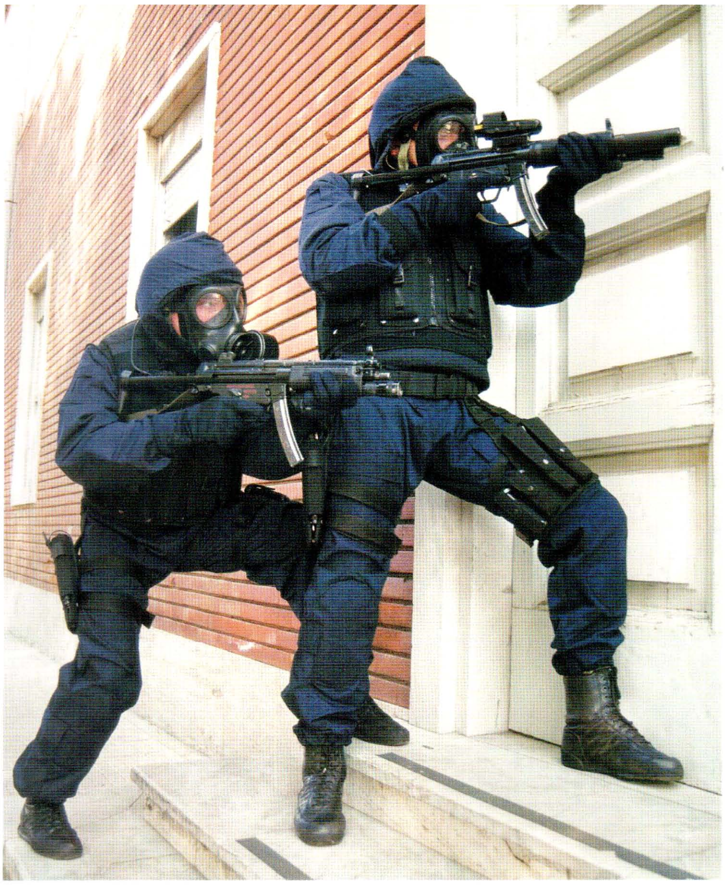
As soon a possible, the 1st Battalion will be strengthened by the addition of a third Special Forces *incursori* company, the 130th. The main reason for this is to activate an appropriate turnover among the units and to reduce the operational time.

The company HQ detachments, which are usually reinforced by signal and support elements, will be able to establish an advanced logistic base in the area of operation. The regimental headquarters, freed from the need to assign command modules in theatre, will concentrate on its most important task: the training of the unit at home.

The RAFOS

The *Reparto Addestramento Forze per Operazioni Speciali* (Special Operation Forces Training Unit) is responsible for special operations training, not only for future soldiers assigned to the regiment, but also for selected elements of the Army and the Air Force. On its small command depend two instructional units: the 101st Training Company, which is tasked with selection, continuation training, and specialization courses, and the BAI, the *Base Operativa Incursori* (Incursori Operational Base), a structure provided with a dock at the mouth of the River Arno inside the former Presidential Residence of San Rossore, which is now Natural Park. The BAI, literally created from the work of operators acting as land surveyors, bricklayers and carpenters, today hosts all amphibious and underwater activities of the regiment and many more training actions, thanks to the presence of a helicopter landing area. It has been further enlarged with the prefabricated modular houses designed to accommodate some operative detachments in the isolation phase that precedes a mission. Safely stored at the 'Sea Base', as it is usually called, are the boats of the regiment: inflatable boats, canoes, rigid raiders, and RIBs.

The creation of the RAFOS as an independent battalion-level unit has allowed the assignment to it of new and difficult tasks, making the training component of the Col Moschin Regiment the true Special Operation Forces school for the Army and the Air Force. RAFOS instructors, fully operative *incursori* who rotate to training duties for a period of about three



Counter-terrorism techniques enable the regiment to support Police and Carabinieri SWAT-type units in larger operations that require a number of operators. Note the assault gear, anti-flash hood, gas mask, ballistic vest, H&K MP-5 with holographic sight, pistol holder, and spare magazines.

SF incursori spend a lot of time in their "killing house" learning instinctive shooting, Close Quarter Battle techniques, and going through rapid magazine change and malfunction clearing drills.

years, also pass on some of their skills to other units, such as the Alpine Parachute Battalion "Monte Cervino". These soldiers attend a six-week Ranger course that trains future rangers in combat patrol tactics, land navigation, and tactical movement (particularly at night), and teaches the techniques of operative and instinctive shooting.

The Alpini Paratroopers remain at the RAFOS for two more weeks to pass an amphibious mobility course on the use of inflatable boats and canoes and on the techniques of the amphibious raid. The ranger training for the Monte Cervino Battalion is, in fact, modular. To be ranger qualified, the Alpine Parachutists must pass several more courses: basic parachuting (static line), mountain training in summertime (eight weeks of mountaineering, rock climbing, rappelling, and high-altitude warfare) and wintertime mountain training (cross-country and alpine skiing, avalanche prevention, and cold weather warfare and survival skills for eight weeks).

The RAFOS also trains Air Force rescuers on patrolling and tactical movement during a six-week course, and some air rescuers even complete the specialization course for Parachute Sapper, showing the level reached by the personnel of the AMI.

The Humint Course emphasizes the recognition of vehicles and equipment and the techniques of observation and information collection. It lasts about six weeks and is designed for members of various units in the Army, as well as personnel from the intelligence branch of high level commands.

The development of the personnel for the LRRP company is in some sense the most demanding among the newly assigned tasks because of its duration and also because it inevitably absorbs some potential candidates for the *incursori* companies. The LRRP training begins with a three-week selection phase for finding soldiers who have the potential for further training. After this, there is a static line parachute course at the CEAPAR (Parachute Training Center) in Pisa and the basic LRRP course at the RAFOS: four months of instruction on patrol activity, tactical movement,

This man carries a Heckler & Koch MP-5 submachine gun equipped with a Sure-Fire torch (flashlight) for searching a room during CT training. Col Moschin operators are armed and equipped with the best available equipment.

Rigid inflatable boats allow incursori *teams to perform coastal infiltration in almost all maritime conditions.*

Zodiac Hurricane coxswains go through a special course in the Italian Navy to learn to operate in the open sea under severe conditions. They stand or sit at a steering console in the middle of the boat.

reconnaissance techniques, and establishing observation posts. Then comes advanced training for about 18 weeks: six for free-fall parachuting, six for the Ranger course (the same as the Alpini Paratroopers) and six more weeks of Humint training, always at the RAFOS. The LRRP training ends with a phase of environmental mobility, with the same mountain, skiing and amphibious phases as the Rangers. Selected elements attend the HALO/HAHO course for advanced parachuting techniques.

Selection and Training

The main task of the RAFOS is to guarantee the development of new soldiers assigned to the Regiment. The training of future *incursori*, fully qualified Special Forces operators, requires a lengthy procedure of about two years. That period is needed to find, select and prepare soldiers with high motivation and will power, advanced military skills, and the ability to act in a rational manner in difficult situations while under heavy mental and physical stress. They must be able to operate with non-conventional techniques in any kind of environment. The recruitment area of the unit is represented today by personnel in permanent service throughout the entire Army: officers, warrant officers, NCOs, and Permanent Service Volunteers (VSP).

A group of selectors of the 9th Regiment is sent to the RAVs (*Reggimenti Addestramento Volontari* – Volunteer Training Regiments) and to Army schools to select soldiers who wish to join the Special Forces. Candidates must pass the Pre-selection of Physical Ability to prove their physical efficiency. The applicants must pass a series of tests of strength (at least 10 pull-ups, 15 parallel bar dips, 30 push-ups, and 40 sit-ups, with each series of exercises to be carried out in a maximum of one minute with an interval of 10 minutes between tests) and of resistance (running 1500 meters [1640 yards] in less than six minutes).

Those who pass go to the RAFOS Training Company for a selection training period of three weeks, which is normally carried out twice a year, in May and October. The selection process tests future Special Forces operators' physical, emotional and mental stamina. It comprises seven timed endurance marches of increasing length (from 10 to 25 km [6.2 to 15.5 miles]) and difficulty that must be completed while carrying a 22-kg (48.5-lb) rucksack. Candidates also receive a preview of what waits for them in the next phase with exercises in patrol activity, night tactic movement, etc. The "survivors", if they are not already parachute qualified, must attend the basic parachute course at the CEAPAR in Pisa before starting the real formative course that begins in the middle of February for the ones selected in October, and in September for those chosen in May.

Incursori training is currently divided into two phases: **Specialization Course 80/B for Parachute Sappers** and **Qualification Course for Parachute *Incursore***. Specialization Course 80/B for Parachute Sappers, which lasts about 10 months and is very demanding, teaches the basic skills of Special Forces soldiers. Instructors, drawn from operative companies for about three years, follow the trainees in every moment of their learning process. There are also other instructors for specific subjects (explosives, weapons, topography, amphibious operations, etc.), generally veteran *incursori* warrant officers assigned to the RAFOS on a permanent basis. The training covered during this phase includes difficult physical challenges such as runs, an obstacle course, patrolling and reconnaissance, and land navigation (cross-country). Also taught are movement at night, small unit tactics, Special Forces techniques and standard operative

The Saco Mk.19 automatic grenade launcher added new firepower to the Col Moschin regimental armory.

Col Moschin operators specialize in amphibious warfare with Zodiac Commando inflatable boats equipped with a 40 HP outboard motor. This model of assault boat can be dropped by parachute and automatically inflated when in the water.

Zodiac inflatable boats are the mainstay of waterborne operations within Italian Special Forces.

Amphibious and underwater training allow teams to infiltrate hostile shorelines undetected. The inflatable boat can be left behind while the crew goes ashore.

procedures, immediate action drills in case of ambush, weapons expertise, basic demolition and explosive handling, and basic combat first aid. Applicants endure various forms of physical and mental stress and their qualities are assessed through the analysis of performance and behavior. The difficulties of combat are simulated by hunger, lack of sleep and constant pressure.

Once they have successfully completed the 80/B course, the trainees pass on to the Qualification Course for Parachute *Incursore*, which lasts about 14 months, to increase and specialize their skills and make themselves capable of operating in various natural environments. The training schedule requires that they pass a series of different courses, some of which are at the RAFOS, while others are conducted at different Army schools. Among the former are:

Escape, Evasion and Resistance to Interrogation, a very demanding six-week survival course that often leads to the elimination of candidates who have even passed the 80/B specialization course without any problem;

Amphibious Course, which teaches small boat handling, from a two-man Klepper canoe to the Zodiac inflatable and rigid raider. At the end of these four weeks, the navigation license is obtained;

Recognition Course, which teaches how to recognize vehicles, weapons and equipment of foreign armed forces. Once dedicated to Warsaw Pact topics, today the area of interest is considerably expanded;

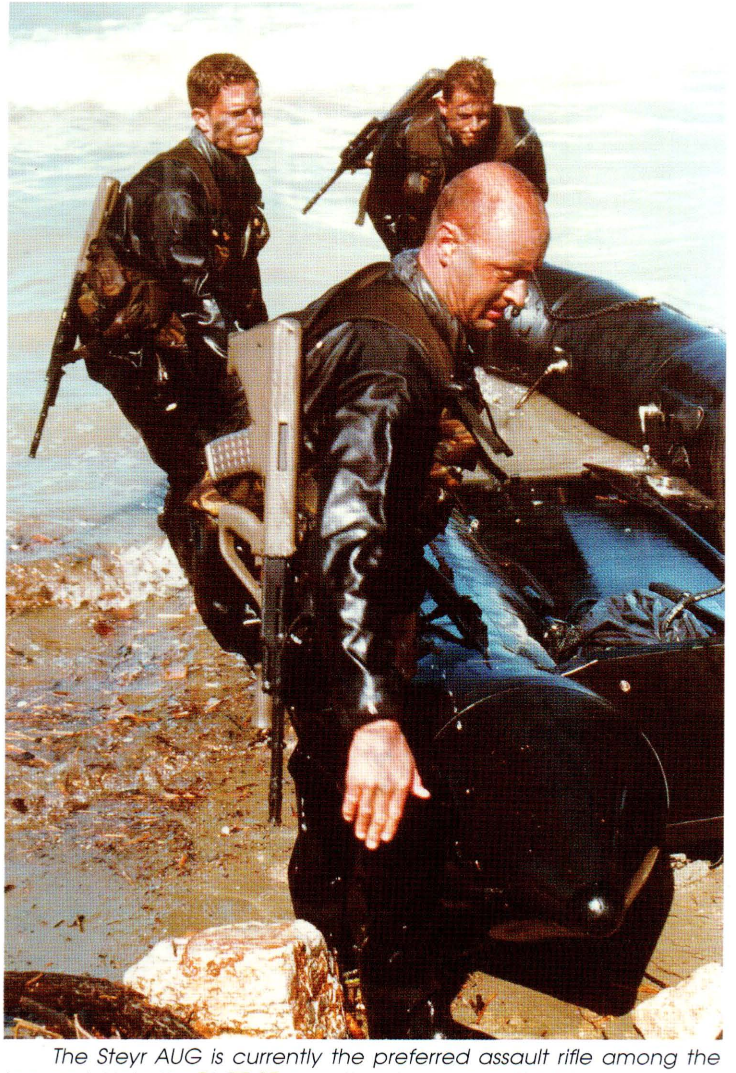
Close Quarters Battle (CQB) course on precision marksmanship, neutralization of an enemy at close range, conducting direct actions in urban environment, counter-terrorism missions, and hostage rescue. A shooting facility, appropriately called the "killing house", allows for simulating CT operations and building-clearing techniques;

Special Forces Communications course, which makes it possible to use the Regiment's sophisticated radios, which are different from those issued to the rest of the Army.

The courses conducted at the schools, which are mainly connected with mobility and infiltration techniques, are:

Free Fall Parachuting: During six weeks at the CEAPAR, the

The small rubber boats used by the incursori *have very little radar or infrared signature.*



The Steyr AUG is currently the preferred assault rifle among the incursori. *Note the PLCE 95 assault vest worn over the black neoprene suit.*

Would-be incursori *engage in amphibious training near Livorno. Future* incursori *are sent to a four-week amphibious course to learn about surface swimming, small boat handling and canoeing.*

Usually two soldiers in each Operational Detachment are qualified as snipers. The H&K G3 SG/1 is basically a normal G3 assault rifle fitted with a special trigger unit and an optical sight mounted over the. receiver. This permits the use of iron sights without removing the telescope.

An Operational Detachment is composed of eight men: commander, second-in-command/operations specialist, intelligence specialist, medic, weapons specialist, demolition specialist, and two communications specialists.

Parachute School, students learn advanced parachute skills and the use of ram-air square parachutes that permit the team members to land with great precision in a very limited space. The parachute canopies they use are the Para-Flite Inc. MT-1XXs;

Basic Ski Course: Eight weeks at the CEALP (Alpine Military School) in Aosta are dedicated to learning cross-country and alpine skiing, avalanche prevention, and winter warfare and survival techniques;

Basic Alpinism Course: Eight weeks at the CEALP provide basic training in mountaineering, rock climbing and high-altitude warfare;

ARO-ARA Course: Taught with the help of Italian Navy COMSUBIN combat divers, this 12-week course trains students for underwater operations with both open-circuit and closed-circuit SCUBA equipment, and teaches underwater compass swimming and how to make "wet jumps" directly into the sea.

Earning the qualification of *incursore* paratrooper is, however, sufficient for finishing two of the last three mobility courses. At the end of this long process, only a few "survivors" receive the coveted license and move on to an Operational Detachment where, alongside expert colleagues, they learn in the field thousands of secrets related to their difficult jobs.

Short-term volunteers selected to become *Guastatore* Paratroopers reach the Training Company at the completion of their basic infantry training and after they have passed the static line parachute course. At the RAFOS, they will attend the **80/A Course for *Guastatore Paracadutista*,** which lasts approximately four months. It is a shorter version of the 80/B course for volunteers on permanent service assigned to SF companies. It is less physically demanding and does not cover explosives and demolition skills.

Operations

Officers receive the same training as other ranks and are further tested in patrol leading, mission planning, land navigation, and topography. Before taking command of a detachment, they must go through a period of apprenticeship alongside another officer with lengthy experience who normally belongs to the *Ruolo Speciale Unico* (i. e., a former NCO). Something similar happens to warrant officers trained during the new development cycle who have received excellent military and general education in a three-year course at the School for Junior Grade Officers Cadets in Viterbo, but who lack specific experience.

The training process is so tough that only about 15-20 % of those attempting the selection successfully completes the specialization and qualification process, earning them the right to wear the *incursori* qualification badge. Many drop out during the training courses for survival

The Minimi light machine gun is an individually portable, belt-fed, gas-operated weapon that fires the same ammunition as the assault rifles. The weapon's standard magazine load is 200 rounds in disintegrating belts.

and resistance to interrogation, and physical accidents that interfere with the completion of the phase are not rare. With such a grueling selection process, it is also obviously difficult to guarantee (apart from the normal general replacement of the operators) a substantial increase in numbers as requested by current expansion programs. It is made even more difficult by the creation of the LRRP company. Given this situation, it might be best to focus both the limited capacity for strengthening and the small number of instructors on priority goals. It should be remembered, too, that the *incursori*, and Special Forces in general, can carry out the missions of LRRP units, while the reverse is not true.

Training never ends for the SF soldiers. All Operational Detachments maintain operational status, continuing to hone their skills and further increasing their level of preparedness by participating in a series of national and international exercises held every year. Collaboration with the Italian Air Force is very intense, both with the 46th Air Transport Brigade and the HH-3F helicopters of the 15th Wing, which are currently the best equipped to operate in support of the Special Forces. A lot of time is dedicated to the traditional function of the unit, with exercises in raiding and sabotage beyond the lines, ambushes, the capture of enemy VIPs, and area interdiction. Participation in international SF exercises allows for stimulating interaction with similar allied units and improves joint-operation capabilities. Apart from the US Special Forces, the closest relationships are with the British SAS, the Dutch *Korps Command Troepen* and the Danish *Jaegercorpset*. All these units, along with the 9th Regiment, contribute to the Special Forces component of the NATO Rapid Reaction Corps.

Individual readiness is also increased as the troops receive additional training in a variety of techniques to assist them in executing their missions with the greatest probability of success. Further airborne infiltration training is available with HALO (High Altitude Low Opening) and HAHO (High Altitude High Opening) military free-fall parachuting.

The Litton AN/PVS-17 Mini Night Vision sight was designed to meet the specific requirements of the U.S. Naval Surface Warfare Center for a lightweight, compact, high performance system. In the hands of the incursori, *it will be mounted on M-4A1 carbines and Beretta assault rifles.*

These techniques enable SF teams to be inserted silently during covert infiltration into operational areas. Selected soldiers are sent to the Military Alpine School for advanced mountain and ski training where they can improve themselves and even rise to the level of an instructor. Others attend the sniper course at the Infantry School at Cesano near Rome. After taking a suitable advanced course in English at the Army Foreign Languages School at Perugia, they may pursue other specialization courses that are held abroad, mainly at the International Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol School in Pfullendorf. Here the *incursori* may attend the medical course for the Special Forces, the Close Quarter Battle course, and recognition, operation planning, and patrol leader courses. Further training exchanges take place with the British Special Air Service, and collaboration with south shore Mediterranean countries has begun to help improve desert warfare skills.

Free-fall training is given to those who will become incursori *and to the soldiers in the new LRRP company. HALO/HAHO parachuting allows the silent insertion of troops behind enemy lines.*

A paratrooper makes a final check before a free-fall jump. Note how the rifle is secured to his side.

Even though the official policy of the Regiment calls for a basic formation of cross-trained operators, the continuing demands for out-of-area missions have drastically reduced the time available for training and forced the teams to be only partially specialized. In every *incursori* SF Company, some Operational Detachments are specialized in HALO/HAHO techniques, others in amphibious and underwater missions, while the remaining detachments are specially trained for winter and mountain warfare.

Weapons and Equipment

Incursori are familiar with many foreign weapons widely used around the world, and you can find them in the Regiment's armory for training purposes. Normal weapons organic to Operational Detachments permit Special Forces soldiers to choose the most suitable tool for the specific job from among a wide range of different systems. Every operator is also currently armed with a handgun, generally the classic Beretta 92SB pistol, which is sometimes equipped with coaxial Sure-Fire torch (flashlight). For close-quarter battle, anti-terrorism operations and hostage rescue missions, they use the H&K MP-5 family of submachine guns, which are also available in the silenced SD3 version. These excellent German weapons, which have replaced the Beretta M-12 machine-guns, may be fitted with many different aiming and night vision devices, a Sure-Fire torch (flashlight), laser pointer with visible or IR light, Hensoldt & Sohne white searchlight, and the brand new EOTech Mod 550 HD holographic sight.

As for assault rifles, the 5.56-caliber Beretta SCP-70/90 in is still in use. Despite some defects and an excessive weight, many still appreciate it for its reliability in all the situations and its good precision. Since the mid-nineties, the Regiment's preferred assault rifle has been the Steyr AUG, a light and reliable weapon that is revolutionary in certain aspects. This weapon, however, could not satisfy the exacting demands of the *incursori*. This is the original version, with fixed 1.5x optics, and does not offer the necessary flexibility since it cannot be fitted with different sights. Also, the trigger is not progressive and is hard to operate due to a long lever that connects the trigger with the trigger case.

Within the Italian Army's Air Cavalry Regiment "Antares" in Viterbo, some CH-47Cs are being modified for Special Forces operations, receiving improved sensors, night vision devises, and infrared countermeasures.

For these reasons, the Regiment is to be issued the Special Operations Peculiar Modification (SOPMOD) Colt M-4A1 carbine, the same one adopted by the US Special Operations Forces.

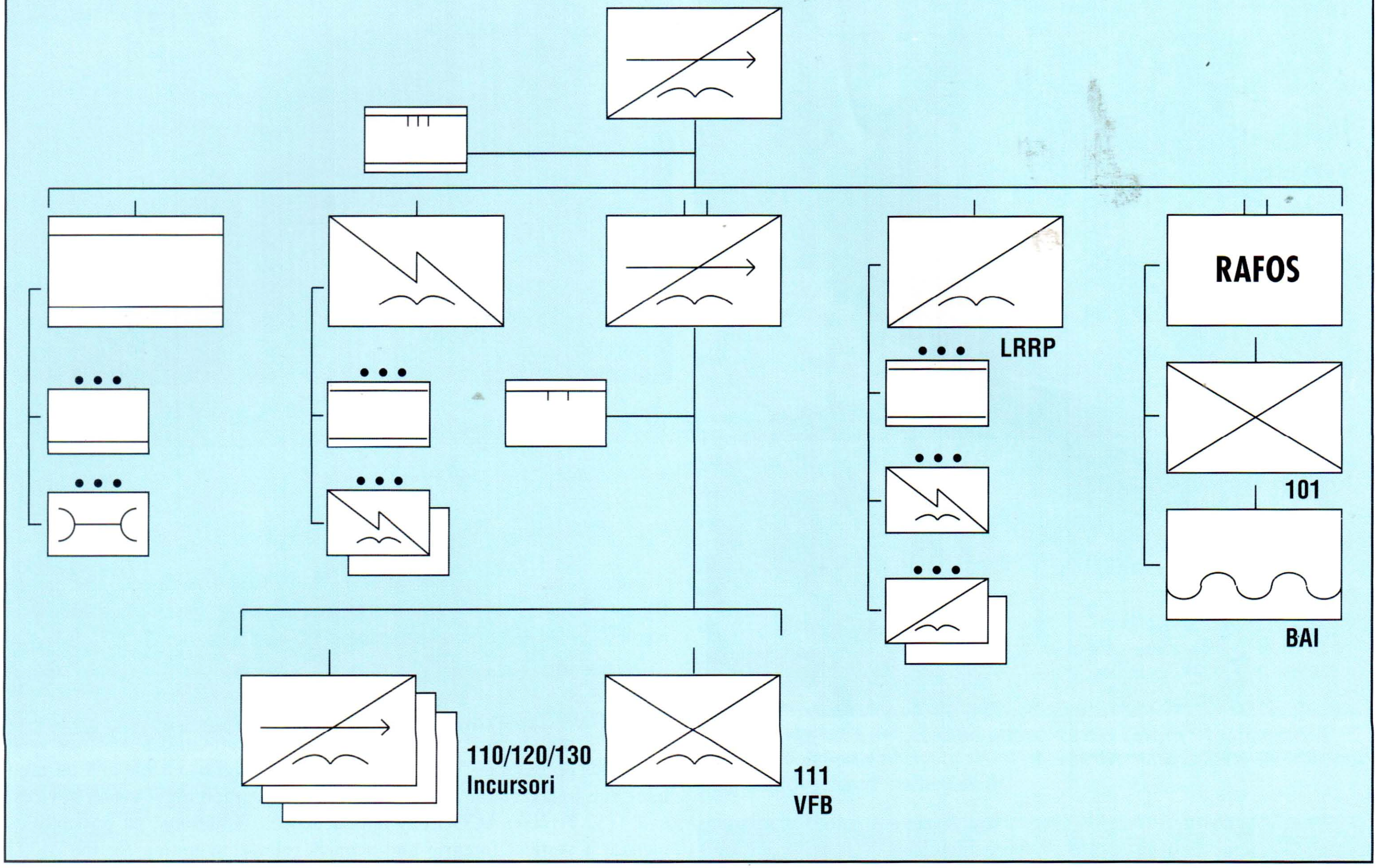
This is a compact version of the famous M-16A2 rifle, specifically designed for special military operations. Using four parallel accessory mounting rails located around the barrel, the carbine can be fitted with numerous accessories, such as EOTech reflex sights, visible and infrared laser aim lights, Litton AN/PVS-17 third generation night vision devices, and 4x32 Trijicon ACOG day optical scopes. Additional kit possibilities include a vertical foregrip and a quick-release mounting for the M203 40mm grenade launcher.

Apart from the classic 7.62mm NATO-caliber H&K G3/SG/1, which is still appreciated for its durability and flexibility of use (if necessary, it can be used as a traditional assault rifle), snipers use the semi-automatic MSG90 from the same company. It is more precise, but also a little delicate. The Mauser SP66 and SP86 are also used for certain missions. Also available is the silenced version of the AWP from British Accuracy International, a weapon suitable for specific tactical situations. The classic 12.7-caliber Barrett M82A1 is also used for heavy sniping. It is widely appreciated for its capacity to accurately hit a protected target at a range of up to 2000 meters (2186 yards). The *incursori*'s preferred shotgun now seems to be the 12-gauge Beretta RS 202, which is extremely light and compact. The Franchi SPAS 15 is also available. The 40mm Heckler & Koch HK-69A1 *Granatpistole* individual grenade launcher is to be replaced by the M-203, which is fitted under the barrel of the new carbines.

For fire support, each Operational Detachment normally uses at least one Minimi, an individually portable, air-cooled, belt-fed 5.56mm light machine gun, available in both the initial version, with a crutch butt, and the Mk.2 version with a composite butt and folding carrying handle. For mounted operations, the Regiment's vehicles can be fitted with the old but reliable 7.62mm MG-42/59 machine gun, the heavier 12.7mm Browning M2 and the Saco Mk.19 automatic grenade launcher, which fires a variety of 40mm grenades at a maximum range of 1500 meters (1640 yards).

If a SF mission requires that an enemy tank or bunker be engaged, the Operational Detachments can use several anti-armor weapons. These include the Instalaza C90 light rocket launcher, which has a range of 300-400 meters (328-437 yards) and a container/launcher that is discarded after firing, and the powerful Dynamit Nobel Panzerfaust 3, a system that can be fired from enclosed spaces and provides effective engagement capabilities against modern tanks.

Organizational chart of the 9th Assault Parachute Regiment.



If necessary, it is possible to use the Milan anti-tank missiles used by Parachute Infantry Regiments, and which the *incursori* are regularly trained to fire. In the near future the 9th Regiment should be receiving a limited number of Rafael Gill/Spike third generation "fire and forget" anti-tank missile systems that will be useful in engaging enemy hard targets.

The Col Moschin Regiment is equipped with many different types of aiming sights and night vision devices. Apart from the weapons mentioned above, the AIM-1D laser searchlight is also in use, to be used during night engagements along with IL goggles like the Norwegian Simrad GN3 or the more recent Litton AN/PVS –7B/D, an advanced second generation monocular and the AN/PVS-15 third generation binocular. Widely used is the Simrad KN250F light intensifier, a very flexible system that can be fitted in front of many daytime sights without having to zero-in the weapon. The Steyr AUG, the MSG90 and even the Panzerfaust 3 can use it, too. Available for surveillance tasks are the Sophie portable thermal imaging sight by Thamson-CSF and the Matis from Sagem.

In the vital field of communications, apart from radios normally used by the Italian Army such as the Sincgars SRT-633, the Regiment also uses the Motorola VHF systems for short-range transmissions inside of the detachment, and the modern Thompson TRC-350 HF frequency-hopping, burst transmission apparatus, with related data terminals. There are also kits for surface-to-air connection and satellite terminals of commercial origin.

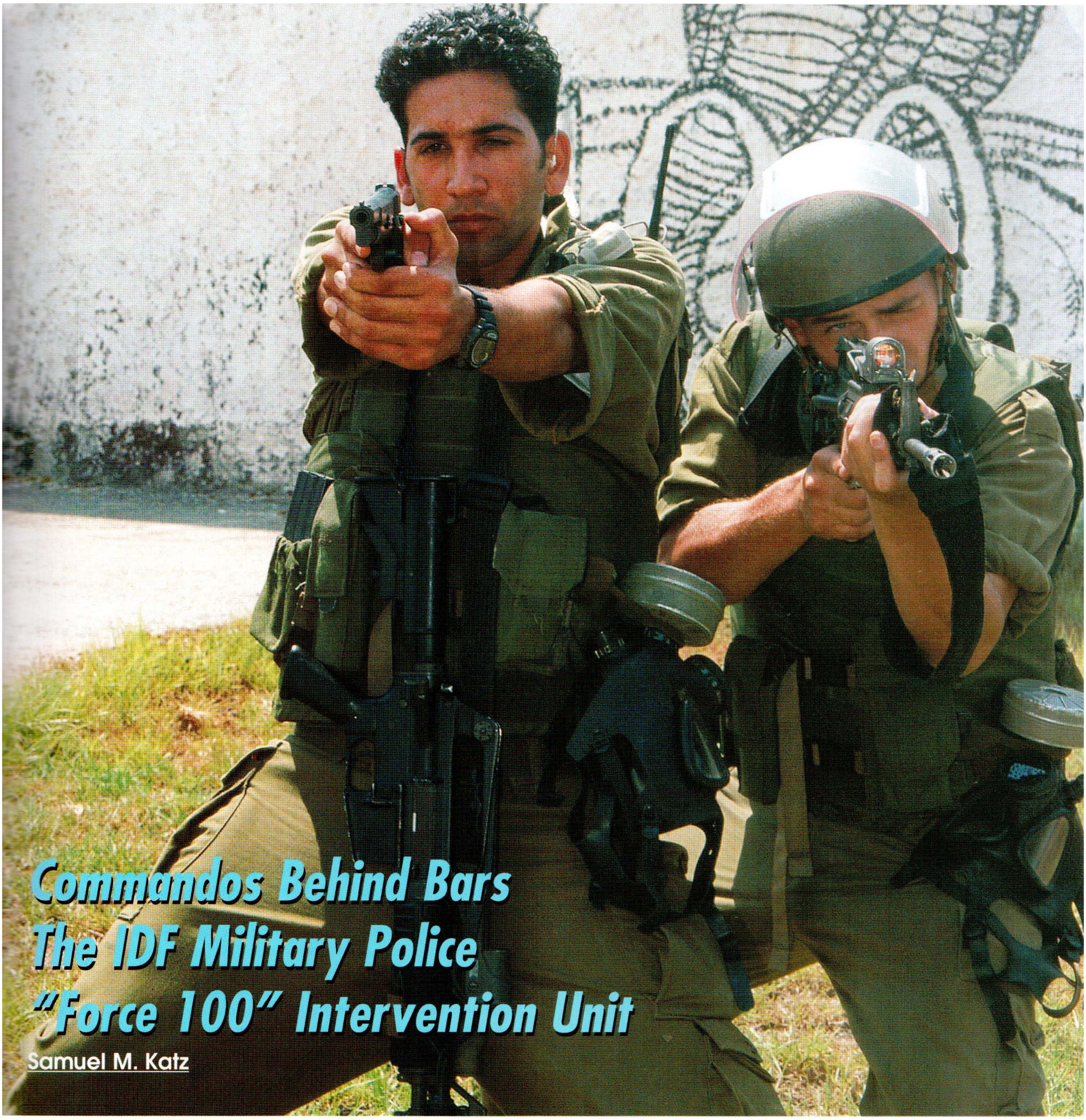
Individual equipment is the best on the market. After using the Israeli Ephod load-bearing system, which was found to be rather bulky and could not be used with a backpack, the Regiment preferred the combat vest, a rational answer to the need to transport in an easy, modular way everything necessary for operations and combat. After having the traditional olive green model as the distinguishing trademark of the unit for such a long time, the Regiment now uses the British SAS-style PLCE 95 combat vest in the DPM camouflage that is so typical of British troops. This equipment has also been issued to the Alpine Paratroopers.

The standard equipment used by the Italian Army Special Forces for ASA (*Attività Speciale Antiterrorismo* – Special Anti-terrorism Activity) tasks is the same as that used by the SWAT-type units of Police and *Carabinieri*. This includes ParaAdidas boots (or the equivalent SWAT model by Crespi Sport), a uniform with a hood that is resistant to high temperature, a dark blue combat vest with built-in protection, and an Avon SF 10 gas mask with lateral filter. A pistol is carried on the thigh in a holster along with some spare magazines and flash-bang grenades.

The fleet of vehicles, which is still essential in some operational locations like the desert, is composed of the classic Iveco VM-90 light tactical truck, which is also slightly protected by added ceramic armor. To be added in the near future is the Defender 90 WMIK (Weapons Mounted Installation Kit), the short-wheelbase model of the Land Rover that is equipped with superior installation for a support weapon (Browning M2 or Sako Mk.19) and can be transported inside CH-47 helicopters.

The regiment's fleet of small boats has been improved by the addition of some new models, the Zodiac Commando inflatable boat and the Zodiac Hurricane RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat).

Powered by a 40 HP outboard motor, the Zodiac Commando is extremely versatile and can be dropped via parachute or launched from a submarine. The larger Hurricane is capable of transporting an entire Operational Detachment and two crewmembers (pilot and machine gunner). Its two 175 HP outboard motors can propel the craft to a speed of 50 knots with a 290-km (180-mile) range. This big RIB is equipped with radar, GPS, two compasses, Loran, and VHF and HF radios.



Commandos Behind Bars
The IDF Military Police "Force 100" Intervention Unit

Samuel M. Katz

A Force 100 1st lieutenant and his second-in-command take aim for the cameras in front of the Force 100 emblem.

The sergeant knew that the situation was dire. Although all of twenty-years-old, he was a veteran operator of the day-to-day battles inside one of the most volatile pieces of real-estate in the entire Middle East. Leading a patrol along a foot post inside a corridor made of razor-sharp concertina, the sergeant fastened his body armor ever so tighter as he tightened the strap for his short-barreled M16 assault rifle so that it would be comfortably positioned along his back in taught firing position. An electric energy of fear and foreboding was quickly enveloping the area, as was the first fumes of burning canvas and the screams only emitted by a man being tortured to death. Barking a series of coded commands into his Motorola radio, the sergeant, a team leader in an elite special operations squad, ordered his men to put on their gas masks and to deploy. The burning canvas, several tents crudely set afire, was meant to mask the execution of a Hamas senior council's death sentence on a man suspected of being an Israeli informant. The sentence was carried out by a five-inch piece of sharpened steel jabbed repeatedly into the hapless soul's eyes, mouth, genitals, and chest.

The team of soldiers did not wait for reinforcements to arrive. There was no time. With their weapons at the ready, they pushed and shoved a path into the angry faces of the tent city, using their weapons as clubs, and perseverance as the only way through. Inside the smoke-filled courtyard, where the suspected informant was methodically being hacked to death, the soldiers lobbed several diversionary devices, along with tear gas, to

A Force 100 operator, with his M16 and Trijicon ACOG Reflex sight, takes aim by a Megiddo Prison watchtower.

Prior to a shift of high-risk searches and enhanced security operations inside and outside the prison, two Force 100 operators stand beside the unit emblem.

break up the fracas while other soldiers, peering through the Trijicon ACOG Reflex sight on their M16 assault rifles, ready to fire on any of the gang the moment they dared make a threatening move on one of the team. Apprehending the knife-wielding mob was not easy. The frenzy of hatred and religious fervor combined to form a lethal cocktail of rage and homicidal desire. But the soldiers were expertly trained for such standoffs. Using the unflinching force of the martial arts and dynamic speed to isolate the ring leaders, the soldiers quickly cuffed the main perpetrators before dispersing the mob to an area where they could be dealt with later, once cooler heads prevailed. The soldiers facilitated medical aid to the mortally wounded man and withdrew to their barbed-wire safe area under the protection of trained weapons.

The sortie to end the butchery was a courageous one and had to be done decisively and dynamically. The soldiers, less than a dozen in all, went up against nearly 1,200 Palestinian men, all Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah hardcore commanders and operatives, and they won.

For the soldiers, veterans of the brutal terrorist war waged between Israel and the Palestinians, the sortie was routine—it was, after all, just another day at the office. Welcome to the world of the IDF's Megiddo Prison and the IDF Military Police elite "Force 100" special operation counter-terrorist and hostage-rescue unit.

Long before Camp X-Ray in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, became a household word for the military prison housing the world's most dangerous terrorists, the Israel Defense Forces Military Police Corps maintained "Megiddo Prison," a maximum-security facility where some of

Force 100 operators train incessantly during their down hours. Here, an operator wearing the unit's characteristic black baseball cap listens in on his Motorola radio earpiece for instructions during a mock-assault on a courtroom inside the prison.

Excellent view of the Kevlar body armor worn by a Force 100 operator before the onset of a patrol inside the "yard" at Megiddo Prison.

A Force 100 team leader suits up prior to a surprise search for weapons inside the Fatah wing of the jail. Note gas mask worn in case the inmates set fire to their tent or tear gas must be introduced.

the world's most lethal terrorists, men who masterminded hostage-taking incidents and suicide-bombings, were imprisoned. Keeping the worst of the worst concentrated in a single location presented the IDF with a Herculean security task. Yet unlike Camp X-Ray isolated on a beachfront along the Caribbean on a sliver of U.S. real estate inside Cuba, Megiddo Prison is located in the northern stretch of central Israel, at a junction in between the city of Afula along a road leading to Jenin, dubbed by many as the Palestinian Authority's hub of suicide bombers. The prison's location is near the site of the biblical town of Megiddo, better known to the world as "Armageddon" (Armageddon is Hebrew for "mountain of Megiddo"), and it is an ironic coincidence that a location where some of the world's most dedicated gunmen and bombers are imprisoned is situated near where the bible predicts, in the Book of Revelation, that the end of the world will transpire.

Security for the facility is massive, though the prison's location is anything but ideal. Situated at the entrance to the Jezreel Valley, in an area where both Jews and Israeli Arabs live side-by-side, the aging British-Taggart fort from the days of the colonial mandate hugs a series of roadways that are well-traversed thoroughfares busy with commercial and pedestrian traffic. The prison is only a few kilometers from the porous frontier separating Israel from the Palestinian Authority and is down the road from Umm el-Fahem, an Arab town sympathetic to the Palestinian cause where, in October 2000 at the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifadah, Israeli police engaged armed gangs in deadly battles. Unlike Camp X-Ray, Megiddo Prison is not located in a sterile environment thousands of miles from where the prisoners are from. Inmates in Megiddo are allowed to consult with attorneys and they receive frequent family visits. These interactions create enormous security concerns.

During hostage-rescue training, meant to extract a military prosecutor from the clutches of a Hamas terrorist, two Force 100 operators prepare to storm a caravan-courtroom inside the prison.

With his M16 5.56mm assault raised to eliminate any possible threat at the door to one of the Megiddo caravans used as an impromptu courtroom, a two man Force 100 tandem prepare to make entry.

A team leader, wearing a gas mask to replicate the introduction of chemical agents, storms a courtroom besieged by armed terrorists.

For the IDF Military Police Corps, Megiddo Prison is unique. It is the only Military Police detention facility dedicated solely to security offenders—most MP installations are stockade-like prisons where Israeli soldiers serve disciplinary sentences ranging from insubordination to drug use and assault. Most of the inmates at Megiddo are serving what is known in the IDF vernacular as "administrative detention," meaning that they are awaiting trial or have been sentenced to terms under five years; terrorists who have been tried and convicted, and who are sentenced to terms in excess of five years, are remanded to the custody of the Israel Prison Service, or IPS, and serve their sentences in maximum-security facilities located in Israel.

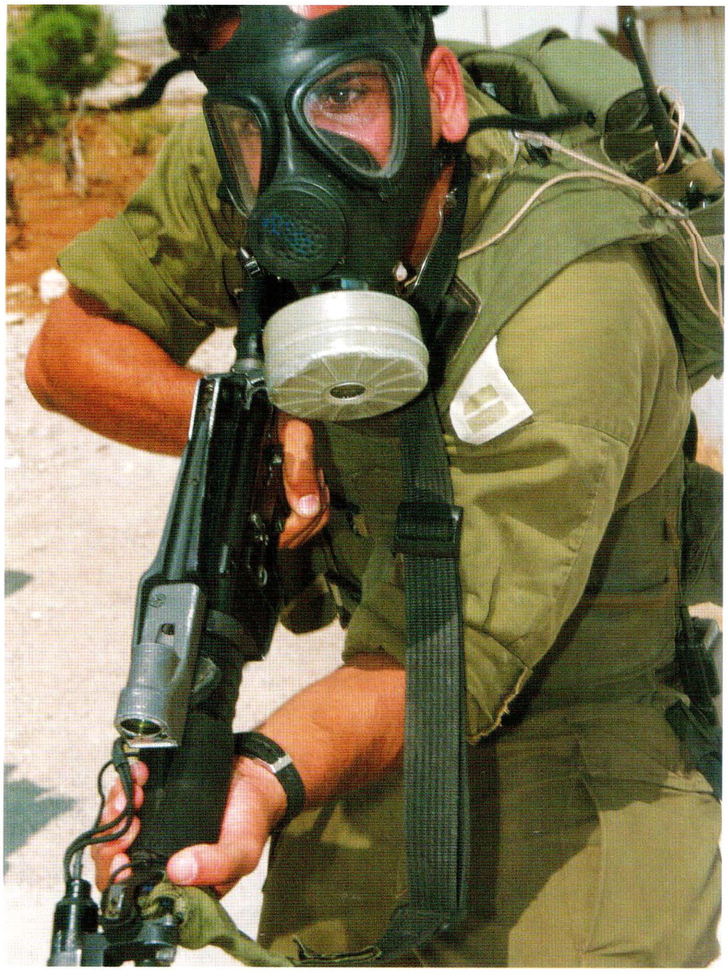
Megiddo Prison was never conceived a permanent correction facility. It began handling high-risk "security" prisoners captured by the Israeli military in the summer of 1982 during the "Operation Peace for Galilee" invasion of Lebanon as a temporary facility. Initially, Megiddo handled the prisoner overflow from prison camps setup in southern Lebanon to warehouse Palestinian guerrillas and Lebanese fighters captured in the Israeli advance on Beirut. Conditions inside Megiddo did not facilitate the permanent housing of high-risk prisoners, so the inmates were housed in large canvas tents in a central courtyard covered by barbed-wire concertina. In the mid-1980s, when the last of the inmates were either released or exchanged back to their organizations, Megiddo was shutdown. The facility was reopened in 1988 during the outbreak of the first Palestinian Intifadah (or uprising) when security forces were inundated with arrests and detainees although most of those sent to Megiddo were held on lengthy administrative detention orders. At the end of the Intifadah, following the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accords, virtually half of Megiddo Prison's 1,300 inmates were released and the facility was shutdown. But the prison's demise was premature. The peace accords soon resulted in the appearance of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and soon a new form of terrorism—that of the suicide-bomber—would engulf the Jewish State. Megiddo Prison was, once again, reinstated as a holding pen for terrorists, though this time the caliber of individual was not the old-school PFLP or Fatah operative awaiting a ten-year sentence for arms trafficking. The inmates were now zealous and pious terrorists eager to die for the cause. Megiddo Prison became one of the most dangerous places in all of Israel. Today, nearly 1,200 of the most dangerous and fanatic terrorists in the world are housed in a congested tent city that could erupt at any moment. Nearly 100 prisoners, the most violent and high-risk, are held at a separate maximum-security structure inside the prison. Force 100 is a unit designed and task to make sure that any terrorist eruption is extinguished immediately

The IDF Military Police Corps (*Ha'Mishtera Ha'Tzva'it)* is responsible for all day-to-day operations inside military courts and prisons. The Military Police is not one of the IDF's combat corps and military policemen are rarely assigned to a combat role. In fact, at Megiddo Prison, most of the guards are reservists. Force 100 is the sole Military Police combat unit and one of the truly unique special operations capable units of the IDF. Although a small unit by IDF commando standards, the twenty-five operators in the unit are among only a small handful of units in the IDF that are exclusively counterterrorist; most other IDF elite units are *sayerot*, or reconnaissance forces, with secondary counter-terrorist capabilities. Force 100 is also the only special operations unit in the IDF that is designed and deployed at one single facility. Unlike other units in the IDF that deploy where they are needed, Force 100 is tasked solely with operations in Megiddo Prison.

Like other prison SERT (special emergency response teams) around the world, Force 100's primary missions include:

- Deployment as an emergency response force inside the prison to execute hostage-rescue assignments of soldiers or military-court personnel seized as captives.
- Deployment inside Megiddo Prison as an intervention unit to prevent a disturbance, or to rescue a prisoner being beaten or stabbed inside the facility.
- Serve as a counterassault force to oppose any hostile threat on the

Close-up rear view of the assault vest worn by a Force 100 lieutenant as he storms a courtroom during a training scenario.



Excellent close-up view of the Force 100 primary weapon—the M16 5.56mm assault rifle fitted with a Trijicon ACOG Reflex sight.

prison, as well as to act as a search and recovery entity in case of an escape by one or more of the inmates.

- Augment the guard force at the prison at times of heightened security during prisoner counts.
- Conduct intensive dynamic searches of the prisoners and the facility in search of contraband, such as weapons, terrorist paraphernalia, cellular phones or other communications devices, and improvised explosives.
- Secure visitor's area and prisoner transport facilities.
- Handle any activity inside the prison involving five or more prisoners.

The IDF Military Police has gone to great lengths to ensure peace and quiet inside Megiddo while at the same time, with Force 100 as its front line commandos, they have sent a message that acts of violence will be met by a wall of determined force. "We try and let the prisoners do what they want to do. It is their society and they run the day-day affairs," explained First-Lieutenant Avi, the unit commander. "They live in tents and areas determined by their terrorist affiliation. Hamas is with Hamas, Islamic Jihad with Islamic Jihad and Fatah with Fatah. They handle their own cooking, their laundry details, and they select their representatives to meet with prison officials. This is their world and they have to live in it. It can either be tranquil and they can be left alone, or they can engage us in a fight, and believe me, no matter how many there are of them, they'll lose."

Because of the fact that Megiddo Prison is bursting at the seems with a prison population in excess of 1,200 inmates, tensions run high behind the walls, bars and barbed wire. As a result, Force 100 is one of the busiest special operations units in all of Israel. "There are no average days here," comments Gil, a team leader and two-year veteran of the unit, "only long shifts and the reality that every one of the men locked up here has it in his will and ultimately his power, do inflict harm upon you. The hatred inside the prison is inescapable."

The quiet in Megiddo is always temporary, and is maintained through a determined attempt by Force 100 to deter the hardest core terrorist from even contemplating some sort of resistance. The unit always patrols in full combat gear, wearing body armor and carrying their M16 assault rifles. Respect inside the "yard" earns respect. Violence warrants violence. Force 100 operators do not hesitate when they must enter a melee of prisoners and use muscle, as well as the martial arts, to neutralize the rioting inmates. "What we have here in many ways is a battle of wills," claims a corporal working the morning shift on a hot afternoon, "they attempt to intimidate us by expressing the hatred and contempt they have for us, as we respond by getting in their face and showing we aren't afraid. And, if it means getting physical—and the prisoners have seen us get very physical—they know that they haven't got a prayer. It is our skills and force what eventually earns their respect. It sounds silly but the reality of life here is just that basic."

On a daily basis, Force 100 ventures into the prisoners' area to conduct surprise searches. Covered by elements of the unit training their M16 assault rifles on the prisoners, the conscript soldiers in the unit are tasked with every hole and hiding place in search of anything that might facilitate an attack or escape, or facilitate a terrorist incident. Shanks, or improvised sharpened devices, are the most common form of contraband found during Force 100 searches. But, as one of the unit's operators admits, "There isn't a prison anywhere in the world that is 100% hermetic." The inmates have been found with written instructions from their organizations back in the Palestinian Authority, as well as with more insidious objects such as zip guns and the components to build improvised explosive devices. "In order to hide the material from us," a sergeant commented, "each tent will hide one piece of the bomb or weapon. The terrorists think that if we find a small spring, and not think of it as a threatening object, and when we find a tube in the next tent that could be used as a barrel, we wouldn't be smart enough to make the connection. They're wrong. We know all their tricks."

Most of the contraband is smuggled into the prison during family visits. The wives and children of inmates are often forced by the terrorist

During the tactical entry portion of a Force 100 training scenario, employing the "1-2-3 Boom" technique, Force 100 operators search for a hiding prisoner underneath a desk.

organizations to smuggle in bullets, knives, and bomb-building materials—often hiding the objects inside their genitals and rectums. To many inside Megiddo Prison, the most worrisome item that the inmates have smuggled in is the cellular phone—something that virtually everyone inside Israel and even the Palestinian Authority appears to always be talking on. Cellular phones provide the terrorist inmates with the ability to communicate with their command echelons and to receive and disseminate intelligence and military instructions. In August 2001, on visitor's day, Force 100 uncovered sixteen cell phones and three commando knives that wives and children attempted to smuggle inside the prison. "The mobile phones provide the terrorists with real-time communications that threatens all of us who work here," claimed First-Lieutenant Avi, remembering a day following a suicide bombing in Jerusalem that killed nearly twenty that, when the inmates heard the news on a smuggled in phone, began to celebrate and riot.

Riots inside Megiddo can be bloody. One of the most violent confrontations erupted in March 1997 when 220 detainees, told that their terms of detention would be extended, joined forces with other prisoners in a full-scale insurrection. Prisoners set fire to their tents and mattresses, and began hurling objects at the guards, and then assaulting intervening units in the attempt to seize a hostage. It took a massive day-long operation by Force 100 and support MPs, to quell the disturbances.

Riots are often staged in order to warrant interest from the international media working the Arab-Israeli beat. "If, through a cellular phone they have smuggled inside, the prisoners learn that a CNN or BBC crew is filming *outside* the prison, cell leaders in the West Bank and Gaza will then summon a prison cell commander to initiate a disturbance of some kind," First Lieutenant Avi explained, "and if they throw Molotov cocktails at us, prompting us to act in self-defense, their propaganda machines can then cry to the world about Israeli brutality."

During a training exercise, a Force 100 operator prepares to fire a round at an area where armed prisoners are resisting. Note the gas mask work, a piece of gear that must be worn by all operators on duty.

There isn't a special operations commander in the entire IDF who is envious of the soldiers inside Force 100. "Theirs is the most difficult battlefield in all of Israel and I rather be alone on an enemy beach than inside that prison," a retired naval commando officer admiringly reflected realizing that few special forces squads in the IDF could withstand the pressure—and perpetual threat-level—of working so outnumbered against such an overwhelming terrorist populace on a day-to-day basis, "but the Military Police must recruit well because these guys get the job done in brilliant fashion."

The Military Police Corps is *not* one of the elite arms of the IDF—very few eighteen-year-old conscripts about to embark on their three-years of mandatory military service *volunteers* to be a MP. Conscripts who excel during basic training and show command and decision making skills along with physical and combat prowess are monitored by Military Police commanders who review the soldiers' personnel and service files to see if they are Force 100 material. Only those deemed as potential candidates with a small chance of succeeding through the unit's arduous training program are permitted to volunteer—a soldier must be invited to a meeting with Military Police commanders and only then, after an extensive interview process, is he allowed to volunteer for a possible slot in Force 100.

Force 100 is the elite of the Military Police Corps and unit volunteers undergo a lengthy—almost unforgiving—training regimen that can last nearly a year. Once the volunteer has been handpicked for a slot in the course, he must first pass a *Gibush*, or trial period, to see if he is unit material. The *Gibush* tests a soldiers' mettle, as well as his personality and ability to adapt and survive in a close-knit society; because the force is relatively small, any new member in the unit must be able to fit in to the intimate society that is an elite combat force. There is a fifty-percent attrition rate in the Force 100 *Gibush*—and an even higher one once training commences. The Force 100 special operations counter-terrorism course lasts over eight months and consists of the following:

- Twelve weeks of advanced combat training.
- Eight weeks IDF NCO course at the IDF's Infantry School.

Once the MPs in the course are certified as NCOs, they are sent to Megiddo Prison for two months to learn every nook and cranny about the facility. Force 100 candidates observe morning roll calls and counts, and join soldiers already in the unit as they search the tents for contraband. Most importantly, the new members of the unit have a chance to talk to veteran jailers and to learn the tricks of staying alert—and staying alive—inside the prison. It is also during this period that the operators in training will get their first taste of counterterrorist operations, hostage rescue and riot control. Following their initiation at Megiddo, the soldiers are returned into the training curriculum where they attend the following courses:

- Several weeks of advanced prison riot control instruction, as well as prison hostage-rescue, from "Nachshon," the Israel Prison Service intervention unit. During their time with Nachshon, great emphasis is

One of the unit's most pressing tasks is security for the visiting areas, where inmates are allowed to get up-close-and-personal with their families and lawyers. Here, during a counterassault drill, a Force 100 operator takes aim with his trusted Browning Hi-Power 9mm handgun.

With their weapons raised and ready to respond to any threat, a Force 100 entry team storms a visitor's area seized by knife-wielding prisoners.

placed on less-than-lethal techniques to subdue and end riots and hostage-rescue incidents. Everything that happens at Megiddo Prison is placed under the international microscope of human rights groups and the media. Force 100 and Military Police commanders know that even in situations where the unit deploys lethal force to save the life of a soldier—or even another Palestinian prisoner being tortured to death because he was suspected of collaborating—they will be scrutinized and crucified by the press, no matter how justified the shooting.

- Weeks of advanced hand-to-hand combat in the IDF Physical Fitness institute where proactive and defensive martial arts, especially Krav Maga, the indigenous Israeli art of self-defense (one, coincidentally, adopted by some of the world's top counterterrorist units in the world, including the French GIGN).
- Three week counterterrorist and hostage-rescue course at the IDF Counterterrorist School in central Israel where the operators learn dynamic and covert entries as well as selective shooting skills. One of the main topics on the curriculum is "bus assaults" as prisoners are sometimes transported to and from court, medical facilities and their initial location of arrest on IDF Military Police buses and the possibility that an incident will transpire on the way to Megiddo is a very real concern.
- Other courses attended to before the operator is officially granted a spot on the team include advanced pistol classes, sniping, and even NBC warfare.

Life inside Megiddo Prison for a Force 100 operator is constant work and training—unlike units stationed near the frontiers, where ceasefires or seasonal changes might alter their work, Megiddo Prison is a teeming, overcrowded facility with the potential of erupting day-after-day, seven-days-a-week, twelve-months a year. But when the unit isn't involved in proactive searches and security operations, they train for that one instance when the alarm is sounded and they are all that stands in the way of hostages being at the mercy of terrorists determined to be martyred for their cause.

One of the most serious concerns of Force 100 is the military courts inside the prison. The courtrooms are really a series of caravans set up with a judge's chambers (from the IDF Military Advocate General), and prosecutor and defense attorney facilities. The chance that a prisoner will attempt to take the prosecutor, or a judge, hostage is considered one of the most likely scenarios for a hostage-taking incident inside the facility and, as a result, the unit constantly trains to resolve such a scenario decisively and, most importantly, effectively. The Force 100 philosophy is that any assault on a besieged location must be attended to with an all-out effort; although many counterterrorist units adhere to a tactic of entering a location through only "one" entrance, the Israeli tactic for room clearing is, according to published sources, based on operators storming in from the two sides of the door, and some times even from three angles which, in the IDF vernacular, is known as the "1-2-3 Boom" technique.

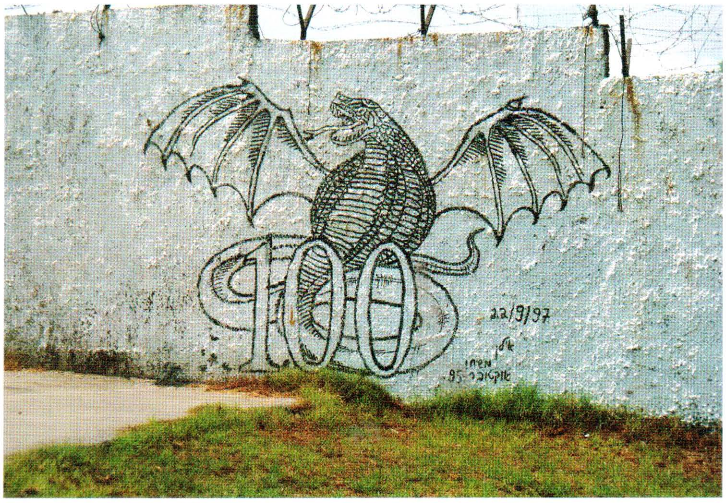
Force 100's primary weapon is the M16 5.56mm assault rifle, though the M4 Carbine, and indigenous Israeli-modifications of the rifle, are also in service. All assault rifles are fitted with a Trijicon ACOG Reflex sight and a Surefire tactical flashlight. Each Force 100 operator also carries the true sturdy veteran of the Arab-Israeli wars—the Belgian-produced Browning Hi-Power 9mm pistol. Although most Israel National Police officers and elite counterterrorist units carry the indigenous IMI Jericho 941, the Browning Hi-Power is a favorite among the Shin Bet and other intelligence arms because it is sturdy, accurate and, in the words of a Force 100 operator, "the one thing in this world that I can always rely upon." Other standard Force 100 equipment includes a gas mask, non-lethal riot control gear and a hands free Motorola TAC communication device with a head set.

During a tactical search of the visitor's area, a Force 100 operator wearing his helmet and Plexiglas visor takes aim with his M16.

It is early morning at Megiddo Prison and the sun's soothing warmth has yet to fully cover the ancient hills. A grayish haze covers the prison as the first inmates awake, and the shuffle and sounds of the morning prayers have yet to overtake the courtyard. At their base inside the prison, Force 100 is preparing for a shift change and a planned search of the tents. The al-Aqsa Intifadah has gone from uprising and sporadic fighting to a low-intensity terrorist campaign, to all-out war. Fighting the conflict from the often suffocating confines of Megiddo Prison, the operators in Force 100 realize that this is a war of Israeli survival and that the enemy is a cunning and clever adversary unflinching in its ability to attack. Force 100 also realizes that the terrorists have attempted, either by contracting the services of mercenaries* or innovative spectacular attacks, including massive landmines used to destroy two Merkava Mk. III main battle tanks The Palestinians have also employed lightning fast assaults by squads of suicidal gunmen on IDF positions, and the concern is that a similar assault might be attempted on Megiddo Prison. The release of their incarcerated commanders and operatives is a high-priority target for the Palestinian terrorist groups, and such an attack, even an unsuccessful assault, would be viewed as an enormous military victory by the Palestinians. Force 100 knows that it is only a matter of time before they are tested in a pitched battle against an armed and determined enemy.

But, as it does everyday, life inside Megiddo Prison goes on. The prisoners are counted, their tents searched, and the delicate standoff of hatred against deterrence continues in a precarious balance kept together by a determined force of counterterrorist specialists who might be outnumbered and overwhelmed, but who are relentless in their pursuit of the mission at hand.

MPs stand at the ready to meet a bus full of prisoner families on visiting day at Megiddo.



The Force 100 emblem painted on a wall inside the prison near the unit's turning out area.

During counterassault training on the prison yard, a Force 100 tandem uses a ladder to scale a wall. (Courtesy: IDF Spokesman)

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* In a February 2001 attack at a checkpoint near the West Bank town of Ofra in which a sniper using a bolt-action rifle killed ten Israeli soldiers and civilians, Israeli sources believe that Yasir Arafat's Fatah organization might have contracted the operation out to an IRA, or British special forces mercenary, because of the tactics and skills employed.

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